



Dominion's End Vol 2: **Aberrant City**
Original novel in Chinese by: [御我 \(Yu Wo\)](#)
Translated by [Prince Revolution](#)

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Prince Revolution! (or PR! for short) was started in late April in 2009 by Erialis for the purpose of translating and sharing the ½ Prince and The Legend of Sun Knight novels (and now many others) with other fans (who unfortunately couldn't read Chinese). PR!'s crew has since exploded to include several translators who double as Chinese to English editors and several Proofreaders. They also have sister sites translating the novels into many other languages.

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Prologue: Behind the Door

Dog-shaped aberrants like those five that had transmuted from humans had actually been quite common. Of course, that was in reference to my previous life. The reason so many people turned into dog-type aberrants was probably because the animal many people were most familiar with was the domestic dog.

Later, those aberrants would evolve into a tribe known as the Dog People. They were widely feared, not for their strength, but for their tendency to move in packs. Whenever you encountered them, there was never just one or two, nor was it even a matter of one or two dozen. There would be at least one or two hundred!

But I only knew about the Dog People from hearsay. If I'd encountered them back then, I would probably have become Jiang Shuyu much earlier. Then again, if this world's Jiang Shuyu hadn't been hit on the head by a tile, would he still have woken up one day as Guan Weijun?

If there was a Jiang Shuyu in my original world, did he ever wake up from his head injury...?

"Shuyu!"

I snapped out of my reverie at Dàgē's furious shout. Before I had the chance to turn and apologize, five shadows had already leapt right at me.

I blanched and slammed the ice staff to the floor. With a twist and somersault through the air, I dodged past the five streaks pouncing at

me. I even managed to kick one of the aberrants, eliciting a sharp yelp. Just when I was about to counterattack, gunshots suddenly rang out. I only had time to kick down one aberrant before the others slumped to the ground by themselves. Upon closer inspection, the aberrants either had spattered brains or knives stuck deep in the back of their skulls.

“Ngh!”

I turned around. Lily was looking embarrassed, still in firing position. She quickly hid the gun behind her, as if that would help hide the fact that she'd been the shooter.

To one side was the silent Xiao Sha. In contrast to Lily, he was extremely calm and had no intention whatsoever to try and cover up. Besides, there weren't any excuses he could have made—the knives were already embedded in the aberrants' heads, conclusive evidence of the culprit, so there was no point in arguing otherwise.

Dàgē glared daggers at the two.

“All right, I'm guilty.” Lily raised her hands helplessly in surrender. “I thought Shuyu was in danger. I never expected him to dodge so easily.”

“I owe him one,” Xiao Sha said simply.

After Dàgē finished glaring at those two, he narrowed his eyes even more dangerously as he turned them on me.

I stabbed the ice staff downward, busting open the head of the still-

quivering aberrant, then mimicked Lily in raising my hands in surrender. "I was thinking about 'the dream,' so I spaced out accidentally."

Dàgē growled, "You dare to space out when confronting aberrants? You're never going out by yourself in the future! If you ever dare sneak out, then you can expect to be chained up for the rest of your life!"

I lowered my head in apology. Even without Dàgē's scolding, I felt I'd been too careless. If Guan Weijun had dared to space out like that back then, forget surviving ten years, she'd have died a thousand times in just one!

"Do you hear me?"

"Yes!" I replied quickly. I'd nearly forgotten that the Dàgē right now wouldn't be appeased by playing coy.

Dàgē's expression was dark and stormy and unbearable to look at. My gaze darted around in every direction, and I almost didn't dare to look him in the eye anymore. I had no idea how to apologize to make his expression look less intimidating. *Dàgē, you're scaring your dìdi to death!*

Zheng Xing tried to smooth things over as he said, "Shuyu's not a merc. He's just eighteen, and he's done well as it is. Boss, don't be too hard on him."

At that, Dàgē's expression clouded up. Although he still looked

extremely discontent, at least it wasn't as terrifying as before.

"Although you're not a merc, Xiao Yu, you don't move like a normal civ either." Cain asked in puzzlement, "Boss never mentioned you having any training, but I think even within our troop, only Xiao Sha can pull off those kinds of moves."

I picked the first piece of bullshit I could think of and said, "I lived for ten years in the apocalypse in my dreams, so I have a lot of battle experience. I just have to train up my body again. Before, when I was out hunting by myself, I was already slowly training myself."

"Didn't you say you were an ordinary woman in your dreams?"

I snapped back indignantly, "An ordinary woman who's lived for ten years in the apocalypse can flatten you with one hand tied behind her back."

Cain started in surprise and exclaimed in complete disbelief, "No way!"

"Yes way." I nodded as I spoke, "Except those who were protected from beginning to end, every single person who survived the apocalypse is stronger than any of us now."

Survival of the fittest. That was the only law in the apocalyptic world.

Cain grinned, showing off his white teeth, then declared, "Then, that's easy. I'll survive ten years as well, and by then, I'll be able to beat everyone here with just one hand!"

Immediately, he was almost knocked to the ground after getting whacked upside the head by Ceng Yunqian.

Just when I was about to shoot a few sarcastic barbs at Cain, I found I couldn't think of anything at all. On the advice of a reincarnated person like me, these guys had started eating evolution crystals soon after the apocalypse began. Adding on the fact that they were already mercenaries who excelled at combat, if they really did survive ten years, becoming strong was a given!

Don't tell me, I accidentally created a super team? That's... the best thing in the world!

In the coming few years, the word "pitiful" wouldn't be enough when describing the situation of us humans. In order to fight against the aberrants and even defend against the originally harmless plants and animals, it was best that everyone become as strong as possible!

Speaking of which, should I tell more people about the evolution crystals? If I can make humans stronger earlier on, maybe things won't get so tragic in the next few years.

"Xiao Yu! Why are you spacing out again?"

I lifted my head to see Dàgē's terrifying look of doom and hastily told him everything that had just occurred to me to divert his attention.
Please don't remember locking me up for a lifetime, please?

Dàgē frowned a little, turned things over in his mind, then said, "Don't worry about that right now. When you meet the right people, you can

bring it up. For anyone who's not qualified..."

...I needn't bother telling them. It was a pretty good way of doing things. As expected of Dàgē, he was much more decisive than I was.

"...depending on the situation, they might need to be eliminated."

Wait, wait, wait! Dàgē, you're moving too fast. Your didi can't catch up!

I turned to look at the others. Amazingly, no one looked the slightest bit astonished. *Now just who's survived ten years in the apocalypse?*

For the sake of humanity's survival, I had no choice but to try to persuade him, "Dàgē, we've lost half of all humans in one go. And going forward, there'll be fewer and fewer of us. Let's try to avoid killing when we can."

Even if extinction is inevitable, at least don't make us guilty of that crime! I still want to go to heaven!

Dàgē clarified, "When I said anyone who was not qualified, I was referring to people like those mercenaries who strung you up."

Then I'd immediately kill them without a word! With those kinds of people, you'd save many lives just by killing one of them. You'd even be praised when facing judgment before Yama, the King of Hell!

"Stop wasting time. Pair up and search. If you see an aberrant by itself, kill it immediately. If there are too many, come back and report it,"

Dàgē ordered everyone.

Just when I was about to obey and start looking for someone to pair up with, he said coldly, "What're you doing? Do you want to be chained up for the rest of your life? Stay here and dig out the evolution crystals."

For the sake of my continued freedom, I had no choice but to crouch down and start searching in the corpses. By now, my autopsy skills were pretty good, and I could dig out the evolution crystals with two or three strokes without getting even a fleck of blood or flesh on me. In ancient times, Chef Pao Ding could butcher an ox¹ easily because he knew its anatomy like the back of his hand. Well, now there was Xiao Yu who could dissect corpses easily too.

The problem with being skilled was that, after five minutes, I had nothing to do. I had a moment to think and ended up examining my ice staff—no wait, my ice spear—no, ice staff, after all. The temporary spearhead that I had tacked on had turned into a pile of shattered ice after the fight just then.

I knew it. I really should've reinforced a dagger. A spear's head had to be stronger than its shaft, since spears were often used for piercing attacks. There was no small number of aberrants with skulls as hard as rock, so if the spearhead kept shattering all the time, it was useless. "Boss."

I looked up to see almost everyone had returned.

Zheng Xing was the first to report. "Boss, we've swept the entire first

floor, but the firearms storage isn't here. We think it's in the basement."

Dàgē didn't look surprised in the slightest. He just nodded and asked, "Any movement in the basement?"

"The door is closed, and we can't open it."

With that, Dàgē and the others exchanged a few looks like they were all in the know. I looked on in utter confusion, with no clue what was going on, and instantly felt a little down as the outsider.

Xiao Sha explained quietly, "Yunqian can pick locks. The locks in this kind of police station aren't a challenge for her. So if we still can't open the door, it's not a problem with the lock. It's likely that there are heavy things being used to block off the door."

I see. I glanced at Xiao Sha. The feeling of having him owe me a favor was pretty good. In the future, I had to teach him how to use his powers more. I had to make sure that Xiao Sha could never fully repay the favors he owed me!

"Is there anyone inside?" Cain asked with interest.

"Unlikely." Lily shook her head as she responded, "It's now three months into the apocalypse. How many supplies do you think there'd be in the basement of a police station? With so many aberrants wandering around on the first floor, it's obvious that the people shut away inside didn't make it out. So they've probably starved to death."

Starved to death, they would've turned into aberrants.

Everyone lifted their guns into position, preparing for the next phase of attack.

We moved to the basement, where the door was. Given that we did not want to create too big a commotion, I had no choice but to push as hard as I could. I hadn't realized just how many things might be piled behind the door. It was really heavy. After pushing at it for what felt like half a day, I only managed to open the door a crack. *God, it's so heavy I could die.*

Yes, that was right, I was the one pushing at the door. Just now, when I had stepped up to help, Cain had given me a look of disdain as he flexed his biceps. That got me majorly pissed off. *Don't think Jiang Shuyu is a frail and delicate pretty boy just because he looks like one. With enough evolution crystals, even a pretty boy can turn into Superman!*

I had immediately sent Cain, who was showing off his abs, flying with a kick. Then, the task of opening the door fell squarely on my shoulders. Because the door was not wide, we could not squeeze in a lot of people to help push. So Dàgē had said, "Since you're so strong, *you* push it open."

Dàgē, actually, your dìdi really is just a frail and delicate pretty boy. I'll never ruin my image again!

"Can't push it open?" Dàgē shot me a look. "Don't pretend to be weak. This is serious work."

"I really can't get it to open," I replied with a grimace. "It's stuck."

Dàgē marched forward, and with one shove, the door that had refused to budge opened by another five centimeters. *Dàgē, your power is healing, right? Right?*

Dàgē observed through the crack for a while. It was only after he confirmed that there was no movement beyond the door that he looked over his shoulder and called out, "Lily, come take a look."

Lily walked up and reported as she peered inside, "There are a few metal shelves. They've warped and gotten stuck together. We'll need to dismantle the door frame if we want to open the door now. Aside from that, the metal shelves are full of boxes blocking the view, so I can't see inside."

Dàgē frowned as he stared at the door frame. It was a door in a police station, and was therefore pretty stern stuff. Dismantling it would be very troublesome, especially since we didn't have the right equipment on hand.

Cain said without much hope, "Boss, if there were guns inside, nobody would have starved to death in there. No matter what, they'd have rushed out with the guns for a fight. So it's likely the guns were gone a long time ago."

"Even if there are no guns, there will still be ammo."

That was true. It was a police station, so they should have no small

supply of ammunition. It was unlikely that all the ammunition would have been taken away, and what the troop desperately needed was not guns, but ammunition.

Dàgē had brought a number of guns to begin with, and we had also wiped out a mercenary troop recently as well. We were not short on guns, and we didn't have that many people who could shoot anyway. But every bullet we fired was a bullet that was not coming back. If we didn't stock up, it was likely our guns could only be used as metal sticks very soon.

"Take it apart!" Dàgē made a prompt decision and ordered, "Now that we've swept the first floor clean, we have plenty of spare time."

This time, I was definitely the frail, delicate pretty boy. I sat in the corner, pretending to be exhausted from pushing at the door and being completely useless when it came to dismantling it.

In the apocalypse, dismantling things was a skill needed in everyday life. Dismantling doors, windows, and lockers was beginner's stuff, dismantling cars and fridges for spare parts was advanced, and combining the various spare parts into all sorts of weaponry was the ultimate skill.

But now, I had decided that my job was being a frail, delicate pretty boy. My role was the deadweight dīdi in the mercenary troop, so forget about beginners' skills, I couldn't even push open the door!

"Don't take it apart. We're coming out."

Everyone immediately raised their guns and pointed them at the door, their expressions like they'd seen ghosts.

From behind the door came the eerie question, "Are you humans?"
We're the ones who want to ask if you are humans!

Everyone exchanged looks, then turned their gazes to Dàgē. The troop leader said calmly, "Aberrants can't talk."

Dàgē was right. Aberrants couldn't talk. Yet.

There was a moment of silence before the same voice from behind the door said submissively, "I-if we come out, you won't hurt us, right?"

Seriously, are you guys idiots?! You think anyone out there will answer, "No, we're gonna hurt you. Come out quickly to get hurt"?

Evidently, I wasn't the only one who thought so. Everyone else looked like they didn't know whether they wanted to laugh or cry, though they didn't look as tense as before. It was better to have idiots than mercenaries inside.

"As long as you people don't attack us, we won't hurt you."

As Dàgē said "you people," he gave the others a meaningful look. True, they did in fact say "us" just now, so there was more than one of them.

There was a moment of silence behind the door, then some hushed chatter, so quiet that we couldn't hear what they were saying. But they spoke very quickly, a sign that someone was very agitated. Soon

after came the banging and crashing of moving objects.

So it seems they've decided to come out. I glanced at Dàgē. Is he planning to leave once he's got the ammo, or is he going to take these people in?

Soon enough, the door was pulled open slowly. Out came two guys and three girls—they all looked around the same age, twenty or so, and every one of them looked like they were university students. The moment we saw how young they were and their general appearance, we immediately relaxed.

Initially, I was still quite alert. After all, ten years into the apocalypse, you couldn't afford to ignore even a young boy standing by the roadside. He might not be human at all!

Then again, given that this was still the first year of the apocalypse, forget little boys, even big muscle men weren't anything to be afraid of. Aberrants still looked like mutants, and there was still quite some way to go before they would evolve into human forms. So these university students were definitely just university students.

What was more, the moment they saw how decked out we were, their faces turned as white as sheets and they looked like they wanted to leg it and hide again. There was just no way anyone could take them seriously as a threat.

"Eh? Jiang Shuyu?" One of the girls suddenly shrieked. *Is it just me, or did she sound a little happy?*

Everyone looked toward me.

I stared at the girl. She looked quite pretty, and although the filth and dirt deducted a fair number of points from her appearance, all she needed to do was tidy up a little, and she'd turn into a beauty.

The girl asked in confusion, "W-why are you staring at me like that?"

I had no choice but to confess, "Sorry, I lost my memories after getting hit on the head by a tile. I don't remember who you are."

Please please please don't be Jiang Shuyu's girlfriend. Dàgē already said I didn't have one. I trust him more than I trust you. And even if we were a thing, we're breaking up right now!

The girl started and asked in disbelief, "You lost your memories? I'm your classmate from high school! I'm Chen Qianru! When everyone found out you got into an accident, we even got together to fold a thousand origami cranes."

Ohhhh, so we were high school classmates? Okay, that's still acceptable. So what about the others?

I looked at the two guys and the other two girls. Chen Qianru immediately explained, "These are some friends who got into the same university as me. They were in different classes from us during high school, so you wouldn't know them."

The others looked a little panicked and started stuttering one after the other.

"I-I know Jiang Shuyu too. Even though we weren't in the same class, we still went to the same school!"

One of the guys said, "No shit, he was the Prince Charming at our high school, and he even got the top grades of our entire year! Everyone knows Jiang Shuyu!"

Well, with Jiang Shuyu's face, being crowned Prince Charming wasn't unusual. But the top grades of the entire year? Jiang Shuyu, could you not be so awesome? I suddenly felt under a lot of pressure—I can't take up your mantle!

Dàgē suddenly interjected, "Shuyu, do you remember anything?"

"Nothing," I replied honestly. I mean, even memories of my blood siblings were things I only saw in dreams, so there simply wasn't a trace of anything like high school classmates.

"I really am your classmate!" Chen Qianru became desperate.

Before I could answer, Dàgē waved to stop her. "I've seen the origami cranes, so you don't need to explain. Is there any ammunition inside?"

The university students exchanged looks, then they all turned to look at Chen Qianru. The girl had no choice but to speak up. "I saw some boxes of what looked like bullets, but there aren't any guns."

Dàgē nodded and immediately ordered the others to go search inside. He headed inside as well—except, before stepping through the door,

his eyes drifted past Xiao Sha. Xiao Sha immediately came to a halt beside me and stopped following the group. Then, Dàgē glanced at me, then at that Chen Qianru, before he finally disappeared inside to join the search.

Dàgē, your eyes sure are expressive. I understood everything! Don't worry, I'll definitely use this high school classmate of mine to find out how on earth these people managed to survive three months inside.

The moment the mercenaries left, the two guys and three girls all dashed at me and started chattering like magpies.

"Jiang Shuyu, how'd you end up with those people?" The guy who had spoken beforehand asked in deep suspicion, "Don't tell me you got captured by them?"

I shot him a look and snapped, "Do I look like I'm captured?"

What idiots! Even though I don't have as many weapons as the mercenaries, I'm still holding onto a staff and wandering around freely. So just how exactly do I look like I'm under capture? Besides, shouldn't you guys be asking about what the hell is with this ice staff in my hand? Do you guys even know what the key topics are in an exam? No wonder you couldn't get better grades than Jiang Shuyu!

"Nah," he replied honestly, then even gave a self-introduction. "Oh yeah, I'm Lu Renjie,² the vice-captain of the basketball team. Have you heard of me before?"

I lost my memories, idiot!

When they heard him introducing himself, the others quickly told me their names as well.

The tall girl said, "I'm called Li Yarong, Ya from *youya*—elegance—and *rong*, written like a lotus."

"Su Ying." The girl was so scared, her voice came out tinny like a mosquito's. If not for the fact that I had eaten a lot of evolution crystals and developed very acute hearing, I wouldn't have been able to catch her name.

The last guy seemed to be a man of few words, simply reporting, "I am Ding Jun."

Then, as one, the five of them looked at the last fellow who hadn't introduced himself—Xiao Sha.

Xiao Sha was silent for a moment before he said, "Shangguan Chensha."

I was bamboozled for a moment, before realizing that this was Xiao Sha's real name. How unusual, his surname was made up of two words. It even sounded like something out of a Wuxia³ novel. Almost every Wuxia novel had some kind of Shangguan character, and more often than not, they were elegant nobles. I looked hard at Xiao Sha to check that he really was a mercenary, and concluded that calling him Xiao Sha was way better.

The five seemed very curious about Xiao Sha. Probably because he

was closer to them in age, they didn't seem to hold the same fear toward him as compared to the other mercenaries. But now wasn't the time for them to dig up Xiao Sha's secrets. Dàgē had given me a mission, so I couldn't come out empty-handed.

"How did you guys end up here?" This should be a pretty good conversation starter. It was really weird that five university students would get locked up in the basement of a police station in the apocalypse.

Unexpectedly, the girls seemed reluctant to talk as they nudged at each other to speak. In the end, Lu Renjie spoke up as he rubbed his head in embarrassment. "We came here to meet up. We figured, since we got into the same uni and all, we might as well come out and get to know each other better."

Meeting up in a police station? Isn't this place a little too unique? I stared at them dubiously.

Chen Qianru sighed. "We originally weren't just five people, but one of the boys got hit by a car when we were crossing the road. He got sent to the hospital, and we were dragged in for questioning. Originally, we were supposed to be able to go home after the questioning was over, but by then, it was very dark outside. We couldn't go out and the police were so busy, they didn't have time to care about us. So..."

So they ended up passing the apocalypse in a police station. That sounded as tragic as Jiang Shuyu's story.

"So you've been hiding here like this for three months?" I asked with

deep suspicion, showing my incredulity for the world to see.

What was even more unbelievable for me was that not a single one of them had turned into an aberrant. Even in Dàgē's almighty troop, they had lost two people out of a group of eight. *So how could a group of five not have a single person missing?*

"Three months?" Chen Qianru looked at me strangely. "It's not been that long. Jiang Shuyu, when did you wake up? Did you mix up the dates or something?"

What? Xiao Sha and I exchanged looks. I could tell from his expression that I definitely hadn't mixed up any dates. There was something deeply wrong with these people. The timing of their appearance, the location they were in, and even their emotions were all wrong!

They were far too calm.

After being locked up in a place full of aberrants for three months, these people could still introduce themselves in such a calm fashion. If nothing was wrong with them, then they were even mentally stronger than Dàgē's mercenary troop, and I didn't believe that any university students in this world were that much stronger than my previous world's!

"Xiao Yu!"

Suddenly, we heard Dàgē's loud roar from behind the door.

Then, the door slammed shut.

I immediately dashed forward and kicked hard at the door. But the damned door refused to budge, so it was obvious there was more going on than just the door being shut.

I looked behind me, to see Xiao Sha holding onto Chen Qianru and threatening them with a knife at her neck.

Chen Qianru screamed, "I don't know why it did that! I don't know anything—"

I swung hard with my staff, but my opponent dodged past it. *That agility of yours is downright ridiculous; are you sure you're just the vice-captain of the basketball team...? Bah! Then is Michael Jordan the captain?*

Lu Renjie was holding onto the steel frame of a window single-handedly and dangling easily in mid-air. He smiled as he asked, "How'd you find out it was me?"

"I could feel the energy waves coming from you just now!" If I hadn't left my original position to kick the door, what he would have grabbed was probably not the window frame but me.

"Is this guy an aberrant?" Xiao Sha asked as he pulled Chen Qianru with him, creating some distance from Lu Renjie.

"No, he's human. He's a person who's got evolved powers like us."

My expression was grim. *Times of disaster, like the apocalypse, really*

did forge men of strong will. Seriously, what the hell's with this guy? Just three months into the apocalypse, and he can already use his powers this well? This is still a time when fire powers are used as lighters, you know?

"Aberrant? That's a pretty interesting way of calling them." Lu Renjie asked with curiosity, "So your power is ice? Looks pretty useful. Why don't you join us?"

I glanced at the door. Unbelievably, I couldn't hear anything at all. *Don't tell me Dàgē and the others were neutralized in an instant? Impossible!* I desperately wanted to do something, but I was tied up here, so I had no choice but to grit my teeth and bear with it. I calmly spoke to the enemy to find out more, "So what's going on in there?"

Lu Renjie made a six with his hand. "He's in there."

"Wasn't he hit by a car?" I gave a derisive look at Chen Qianru. Contrary to my expectations, however, her eyes were full of fear. She didn't look like she knew what was going on at all. *Don't tell me, she really has nothing to do with this?*

When he noticed me looking at Chen Qianru, Lu Renjie started chuckling. "Actually, strictly speaking, it's not wrong to say he was hit by a car. Aw, don't glare at them like that. These people are just rations. If they can't catch anyone else, then they'd have to offer up themselves."

Rations? My expression grew colder. *Three months in and they've already resorted to cannibalism? But right now, the one thing we have*

too much of is food, so no one should need to fall to cannibalism.
What's going on with this guy?

"All right, I'll join you guys," I said simply, then jabbed a thumb at Xiao Sha. "His ability is speed, so he should just about make the cut. He can join you guys too." Actually, Xiao Sha's ability was wind, but at times like this, the less you revealed about your strength, the better.

Xiao Sha glanced at me and released Chen Qianru. But she was so terrified that she had no power in her legs. The moment she was let go, she just dropped to the floor, unable to get up. In the end, the scaredy-cat Su Ying dragged her into the corner, and the three girls huddled together. Ding Jun also stood in the corner in utter silence. They didn't seem like they were on the same side as Lu Renjie, so they probably really were just "rations."

Lu Renjie shrugged and said, "Be my guest. You can go in together."

I gave Xiao Sha a look, and he gave me a small nod. Actually, it was better to leave someone on guard outside. But we didn't know what the situation was like inside, so one person wouldn't be enough if we got into a situation where we had to fight and rescue people at the same time.

I walked up to the door, and this time, the door opened with a twist of the handle and a gentle push.

"Don't go in!"

A sudden shout rang out from behind—the first time that voice had

ever spoken so loudly.

I turned to look at Su Ying. She screamed at the top of her voice like there was no tomorrow, "Idiot! If you can win against this guy, then don't go in! It'll be all over once you're inside!"

It'll be all over? Then Dàgē—No! Never. If my guess is right, the thing behind the door is probably...

That kind of thing will never win against my dàgē!

"Stop!" I shouted at Lu Renjie. He was just about to stomp hard on Su Ying, and given the extent of his powers, one stomp and Su Ying would likely bid this apocalyptic world farewell.

I glanced at Su Ying. She was incredibly agitated, her cheeks flushed red and her eyes brimming with tears, looking much livelier than when she was a scaredy-cat. But more importantly, I could feel energy waves coming from her.

I really couldn't leave Xiao Sha outside. Perhaps one Lu Renjie wouldn't pose much danger to him—I suspected his power to be an increase in his physical abilities—but I had no idea what this Su Ying's powers were, or whether she was friend or foe. It was too risky, so I might as well bring Xiao Sha along. I'd feel better.

I threw Xiao Sha a look, asking him to follow me.

Xiao Sha nodded, then suddenly, the corner of his mouth quirked up. I blinked. *What's so funny in this situation? Don't tell me you have anti-*

social tendencies where you get more excited the more danger you're in?

Then again, in the apocalyptic world, those who were more cold-hearted were the craziest. I better have a word with Dàgē to always keep an eye on Xiao Sha, to prevent him from turning from a cool-faced guy into a pervert.

He walked over, and as he passed by me, he murmured, "You really are like our boss."

"...Wait!"

I didn't have time to worry about how on earth the almighty Dàgē and the pretty Xiaodi were similar in the slightest. *Xiao Sha, where the hell do you think you're going, walking ahead of me? We don't even know what's going on behind that door, so stop running around so disobediently!*

Xiao Sha shrugged off my hand and reached out to grab the door handle, speaking firmly, "I'm the one in charge of scouting in the troop."

I batted away his hand and dashed forward first, tossing behind me, "I'm the new generation of scouts. You're old now, so just take it easy in your retirement at the back!"

"..."

Footnotes

¹ **"Chief Pao Ding could butcher an ox":** Pao Ding, also known as Cook Ting in certain translations, is so good at cutting up an ox that he doesn't even need to look at it to carve it up and has been able to use the same knife for nineteen years. You can find out more about his story by searching "Cook Ting."

² **"Lu Renjie":** Lu Renjie (陸仁傑) sounds very similar to lù rěn jiǎ (路人甲), which means passerby A.

³ **"Wuxia":** A genre of Chinese fiction featuring martial arts in ancient China. The protagonist is usually some sort of chivalrous martial artist, often a swordsman, from a lower social class.

Chapter 1: The Way Things Are for the Cool, Suave, and Handsome

I finally managed to get out of the office, feeling dead tired. Having done overtime for the past few days, today, I could finally... only work two more hours of overtime.

Being able to get off work on time was like that LV¹ handbag in the shop window—it was something you couldn't help but drool over, but had no way of affording! But never mind, the company's overtime pay was pretty decent and was in line with labor laws. Doing more overtime also meant more money, which was always good. That apartment I saw last time with Mom had looked quite decent, but it was such a pity about the price. After doing some calculations, I had realized that I had no way of affording the down payment, so I had no choice but to give up on it.

It's better if I continue working for two more years. By then, I'll be able to afford a house within that price range. Right now, the ones that are within my budget really aren't up to scratch...

"Weijun!"

I looked over, watching in surprise as a boy with a sunny expression jogged up to me. This fellow was always rash and careless like a kid. Every time I put on make up to go out on a date with him, people would always mistake me for his older sister. *Damn it! I'm younger than him by a year, okay?!*

I glowered at his vest, beach shorts, and slippers and asked, "Zhengu,

why're you here?"

Xia Zhengu grinned as he replied, "To pick up my girlfriend!"

I purposely asked back, "Oh, your girlfriend? Is she pretty?"

He frowned a little, and shook his head as he clicked his tongue, "She looks kind of normal."

I unhappily gave him a shove.

Xia Zhengu blinked, feigning innocence as he said, "Just the normal kind of pretty is all. Really not all that pretty."

He really can't sweet talk to save his life! I rolled my eyes at him. *Fine, normal kind of pretty is acceptable too.* In any case, I wasn't any sort of beauty to begin with, so having the word "pretty" was already quite good for me.

"Tired?"

Xia Zhengu slipped his hand into mine. He always habitually held my hand, no matter how many times I tried to train him out of it. I had sweaty hands! It was very embarrassing to have hands as clammy as these, and even though he always insisted that it was fine... All right, honestly, I was secretly quite happy about it myself.

"Exhausted," I replied weakly.

He scratched his head as he asked, "Why work so hard? I've already

told you that I have a house of my own. So just live at my place—you don't have to buy one!"

I rolled my eyes at him again. It wasn't as if I hadn't considered marriage, but I was only twenty-five. Although I'd been dating this fellow for three years, it was hard to know what the future would bring. Besides, no matter what, I still had to give Mom a place of her own.

He said unhappily, "What, you don't believe me?"

Too tired to be bothered to argue with him, I just responded carelessly, "No, no, no, I believe you."

The careless tone of voice obviously pissed him off. He flung aside my hand and walked off ahead by himself. I gazed at his tall, slender silhouette and felt sorry for myself. Not only did I have to exhaust myself with overtime work, I even had to deal with my boyfriend's temper tantrum.

I jogged to catch up. "What's the matter? You're angry already? You're so petty!"

"I *am* petty!" He snapped back huffily as he looked back at me, and he even threw something at me. It was good that it wasn't big and I didn't get hurt; otherwise, I was *not* letting him off for this. We haven't even gotten married yet, and there were already signs of domestic violence!

The thing I had caught on my chest was a small box—it actually looked like a gift. I was bewildered. *Is it a special day? It's not my birthday,*

it's not our dating anniversary, it's not the anniversary of the first day we met, and it's not either the Chinese or Western Valentine's Day... I opened the box.

And inside was a diamond ring.

Judging from the size of the diamond, and factoring in Xia Zhengu's salary, he probably had to save up a year's pay without eating or drinking in order to afford this.

I tore my eyes away from the ring to see him grinning cheek to cheek. He was still in his vest, beach shorts, and slippers, kneeling down and staring up at me. Even the homeless looked more dignified than he was. He was lucky he was a bit good looking. Otherwise, he'd really look like a hobo. Which was to say, good looks were important because you could run around naked and they would still call it art.

"Weijun, will you marry me?" His smile was as bright as the sun. I laughed. I really had been waiting for this question for a very, very long time—for *ten whole years*!

"Xia Zhengu never proposed to me, ever!"

Even though we had weathered the moment of judgment together, even though I had saved his life a hundred times, even though diamond rings had become trash that you could pick up them from the roadside in the apocalypse, he had never once thought of getting one and proposing to me!

I crushed the box with my hand. Now, what I was holding was no

longer a small diamond ring, but a long staff that emanated an icy chill that was as cold as my current state of mind.

"Weijun?" Xia Zhengu stared at me in a daze, then stammered out a question in a frightened and helpless manner, "W-what's going on with you?"

I swung my staff down at that damned face, snarling, "I'm Jiang Shuyu!"

The man's face shattered the moment the ice staff hit. Not just the man, but the entire world shattered like a mirror with that one strike.

Awesome! Xia Zhengu, I've wanted to hit you for a very long time now, hahaha—but now wasn't the time to be happy. It wasn't as if I was hitting the actual person. What is there to cheer about when it's just smashing apart an illusion? ...Though that still felt awesome! Aw yes!

Calm down, calm down. I still have to find Dàgē and the others first. Looking around, I found myself in a corridor with doors on both sides. The dimness was impairing my vision, making it difficult for me to see too far into the distance, but weren't those people lying on the floor our mercenaries? *Cain, Lily, Zheng Xing... Strange, where's Dàgē?*

"Dà..." Just as I was about to yell, I shut my mouth again and spun around quickly. I stared hard at the dark corner and could just about make out a silhouette there. *Is it the sixth person?*

I raised my ice staff, but at this moment, the door behind me opened. Xiao Sha burst in through the door, then instantly slipped into a trance.

He even started sleep-talking. "No! Gē, I'm not you, I won't follow your footsteps..."

"..."

What to do? I kind of want to listen more.

With a deep sorrow that I couldn't hear the story to its conclusion, I dashed forward to give Xiao Sha two hard slaps to his face.

Half-dreaming and half-awake, Xiao Sha turned to look at me and, while still in a daze, gave a forced smile as he said, "Gē, stop hitting me, I'll listen to you."

"...Good boy."

He blinked, his expression clearing up. Then, he instantly flushed red and stared straight at me, unable to say a single word.

"It's an illusion. It activates the moment anyone enters." I explained simply, "I got trapped by it too."

So stop acting shy about it. Besides, everyone has an ex-boyfriend they don't want to remember. Oh, it could be an ex-girlfriend too. No wait, ex-brother—ah, whatever!

I pointed at the mercenaries who were lying on the floor all around us, then looked over at the silhouette in the corner. Xiao Sha immediately went on guard, forgetting about whatever ex-girlfriend or ex-brother he had had. As expected of a professional.

At that moment, the silhouette stepped forward and we instead relaxed immediately. I patted my chest in relief. "Dàgē, what're you doing simply standing there? Do you want to scare your younger brother to death?"

Xiao Sha grabbed me, hissing, "Something's wrong with Boss!"
Like I needed you to point that out. I could see it myself too—those eyes of Dàgē's were so red, it looked like blood could drip out from them at any moment. And that terrifying aura of his was like a demon king's! That mighty aura was materializing almost to the point where you could see it with the naked eye!

I couldn't help but take a step backwards. Glancing sideways at Xiao Sha, I saw that he looked frightened as well. When he noticed that I had stepped back, he even immediately retreated two steps. Obviously, my dāgē's state had also freaked him out.

With Dàgē's every step forward, we retreated one step backwards. Forget that sixth person or whatever; Dàgē was the number one person we had to worry about!

"What's with Boss?" Xiao Sha asked in horror.

"He should be trapped in an illusion."

"Maybe slap him twice like you did just now?" Xiao Sha proposed tentatively.

Fuck, why don't you go do it yourself?

"Boss would never kill you," Xiao Sha hastily added.

I glared savagely at Xiao Sha. "He's trapped in an illusion, so the me he sees might not be me. He might even be seeing the face of his most hated enemy who stole away his woman!"

"Such a person doesn't exist. No one can take anything from Boss."

True—no, wait! The point is, I wouldn't dare to approach Dàgē the way he is now!

By now, Dàgē had already closed the distance between us to just a few steps. Xiao Sha and I had nowhere to retreat anymore. If we went any further back, we could only open the door and run away. But as it was, with the mercenaries lying around everywhere on the floor, a Dàgē in an unknown condition, as well as a mysterious sixth person who was hiding somewhere, there was no way we were leaving like this.

"Give..."

Dàgē's eyes were completely red, almost as if blood would start coming out of them at any mo— no, he really was crying tears of blood. Even though he was so furious that his rage could scorch the very heavens, two streams of red tears were drawn down that Asura²-like face, his pain and agony so intense that they even overpowered his burning wrath. It was almost like he had turned into a living reincarnation of pain and agony.

We were both shocked by the sight.

"Give me back my family!"

Family? I started, instantly realizing what kind of illusion Dàgē was seeing. To him, his family is probably the most important thing in his life, isn't it? Of course, that's not to say the merc troop isn't important, but it's obviously on a different level from family.

Family is something to be protected, an irreplaceable existence. If he let them slip through his hands... Mom, just what was it that you wanted to say to me in your very last moments? I've kept replaying that scene over and over again in my head for ten years, but I still can't come to a conclusion.

Xiao Sha suddenly yanked me to the side. *Bang!* I looked up to see Dàgē aiming a gun right at the two of us, and he had even fired a shot!

A wave of anger surged up within me. Dàgē, you're the leader of the most powerful mercenary troop. You're Jiang Shutian! Are you telling me that a little thing like an illusion is enough to make you shoot at your own little brother? And you dare call yourself my mighty dàgē?!

Terrible things happen when you shatter a dìdì's image of his gēge!

I resolutely decided to beat sense into this Dàgē who had strayed from his path and make him return to the straight and narrow as soon as possible. So I immediately lashed out with my ice staff. *If I don't leave a few penitent marks on his face, I'm not Jiang Shuyu!*

Unexpectedly, Dàgē grabbed at my ice staff, his strength so great that I couldn't pull it back. A strange, slick feeling came from my hand.
Strange, Jiang Shuyu isn't Guan Weijun. This body shouldn't have sweaty hands?

I looked down to see a puddle of water on the ground, all of which had trickled down from the ice staff.

The ice staff had somehow melted.

I almost spat blood when I saw that I was holding onto the shaft of a broomstick. *What happened to his healing power? How the hell did he melt away the ice staff that I had gone through sweat, blood, and tears to make, while enduring days of splitting headaches?!*

"Watch out!"

Xiao Sha rushed forward. I froze and watched helplessly as he was sent flying by a kick that Dàgē had intended for me. He crashed hard into the wall, dropped to the floor, and even coughed up a mouthful of blood. But he just quickly wiped his mouth and yelled, "Jiang Shuyu, run!"

Run? This woman has sworn to never run away in this lifetime, even if facing off against Dàgē!

I flung the useless broom handle to the ground and crafted ice blades under my feet, once again gliding to close in on him. This time, Dàgē actually dared to fire two more shots at me—even as an unfilial

daughter, I never dared to point a gun at my own mother. So you sure have guts to brandish your weapon at your younger brother!

I crafted countless ice knives and fired them at Dàgē, but I wasn't a bastard like him as to raise a hand against my own family. I just targeted the weapons he was carrying, aiming to freeze all those dangerous things he had on him.

But as expected of Dàgē, he still managed to dodge the majority of ice knives despite not having his full wits. Though it was such a pity that the weapons he was holding were knocked away by the continuous stream of ice knives. He made a motion to draw the gun at his waist, but the gun had long been frozen to its holster, so even if he were able to yank the gun out, he wouldn't be able to pull the trigger.

By now, I had already charged right in front of Dàgē. I gave him a black eye with one furious punch. Then, spinning around, I dodged his kick and lashed out with another punch, to finish off the set of black eyes!

"Xiao Yu?"

Dàgē stared at me in astonishment, seeming to have snapped out of it—as if I cared! Using the ice blades under my feet, I whirled around to pick up speed and leapt up at him with a flying kick, sending Dàgē stumbling back a good number of steps. The moment I landed, I dashed forward and used the forward momentum to send him flying in the air. He even crashed against Cain, who was lying on the ground, the two of them skidding on the floor until they crashed to a stop against the wall.

Yes, I was taking revenge under the pretext of doing something proper, and I had intentionally picked the direction I had kicked him in. *So what, Cain? Bite me.*

The raging fury and explosive combat made me a little short on breath, and I panted as my eyes swept around the room. Everyone had woken up and was looking at me like I was a ghost. *Good, no one is still stuck in an illusion.*

I looked at the shadows in the corridor, narrowed my eyes threateningly, and glided over. In the blink of an eye, I was already at one of the doors, and I crashed directly into it without stopping. If I were to give my opponent any time to react, then it might be possible I wouldn't be able to open the door again.

There, inside, was a person who looked like a person, but wasn't a person.

Scenes kept flashing before my eyes, but I already knew those were all fake. They were illusions created based on my memories. If my opponent wanted to entrance me, he would have to be of a much higher tier than me in order to succeed. I was already tier one. I didn't believe he could be tier two!

No matter how unlucky the Jiang family was, there was just no way they'd encounter a tier two aberrant within three months of being thrown into the apocalypse!

Then again, this thing in front of me was a rare specimen. I'd originally

thought it was a psychic-type aberrant, which was already rare enough in itself—most aberrants had evolved to strengthen their bodies, and it was very unusual for them to develop other types of abilities.

No, he was a brainwight, an extremely unique creature. Although they were few in number, every time they made an appearance marked the start of a reign of terror because their illusions were simply too tricky to deal with.

He was mostly human-shaped, except his head was exceptionally large, with his brain exposed and visible through a thin layer of transparent membrane. His only remaining facial features started below the nose.

In my previous life, I luckily never had to encounter something like this. I'd only heard rumors. It was said that brainwights were able to talk from the very beginning. There were also some who said that they were actually humans, but their abilities transformed their appearance in such a bizarre way that they were treated as aberrants.

But there were also the dissenters who felt that if brainwights were human, then where should the line be drawn between aberrants and humans? The line became even blurrier once aberrants started talking, and some even began developing the ability to morph into a humanoid shape.

Even more confusingly, brainwights ate both humans and evolution crystals. At the beginning, they mostly ate humans, probably because it was easier to handle humans than aberrants at that point in time, but this also made them fall definitively into the "aberrant" category. However, in the later stages of the apocalypse, they actually started to

prefer eating evolution crystals.

"If you let me go, I'll tell you everything you want to know."

The brainwight actually started speaking to me. His voice actually sounded quite young, not much different from the voices of the university freshmen outside. So perhaps that story about the meet up and traffic accident was true, except that the sixth person had never gone to the hospital.

I gave a snort of contempt and responded, "You can only read my memories. You have no way of knowing things that I don't know about!"

But did this brainwight really manage to sift through so many memories in the short time I was under the spell of the illusion? Isn't he a little too strong? This is just the third month into the apocalypse—don't tell me he's tier one as well? A tier one brainwight?

The Jiang family really does have bad luck!

"Memories reside in the brain. Even with your very strange condition, you will still have memories."

The brainwight tilted his head to one side, causing the huge brain sac to wobble—it looked like it was going to drop to the ground any second and turn into mashed tofu.

No wonder there were so few brainwights. That exposed brain was a super big weakness right there, making it nearly impossible to survive

the early stages of the apocalypse.

Not to mention their illusion abilities weren't very strong in the beginning. It was actually quite difficult to mesmerize people. It was probably because we had walked into the rooms he had prepared in advance that he was able to successfully enthrall so many people with his illusions.

If mesmerizing people was hard enough, then mesmerizing aberrants was simply impossible. Aberrants in these early days were just focused on eating, eating, and eating. Their instincts were simply too strong, not to mention they didn't have many memories to speak of as newborns, so it was very difficult to conjure any kind of illusion to mesmerize them.

"Jiang Shuyu's already dead. Don't you want to know more about this?"

My entire body stiffened.

"After that accident, his heart stopped for a while. It only restarted after you came. This memory is far too vivid, so I didn't need to search too deeply to see this memory. If you're willing to let me dive in deeper, I can tell you even more things. I can even search other people's memories. I don't have to eat humans. Just give me some of the evolution crystals you've talked about and I can help you with things."

The brainwight kept talking and talking, with only one purpose in mind—to trick me into letting him go or even raising him as a pet, much like that Lu Renjie outside. But the difference was that, while it

was hard to say who was the master in the master-pet relationship he and Lu Renjie had, it'd become even trickier to determine the master between him and me after the brainwight really matured.

Behind me came the soft crunching of footsteps and Dàgē's voice, which carried hints of embarrassment and guilt. It was amazing how expressive even Dàgē's voice was.

"Xiao Yu..."

I suddenly leapt forward, crafting an ice staff out of thin air and swinging it at that huge brain sac. Even if this ice staff wasn't very sturdy, it was enough for dealing with soft brain tissue.

I kept hitting it over and over in a frenzy. Even if that brain did explode after one blow, I couldn't let him go so easily. Even when I beat it to bits, to a pulp, to a puddle of goo, it wasn't enough to make that sentence go away.

Jiang Shuyu is dead.

"Xiao Yu, *Xiao Yu*, stop."

I panted, my heart a frozen lump in my throat, and I almost didn't have the guts to turn around to face Jiang Shutian. But I didn't have any choice in the matter. I looked at him—he had a slight frown creasing his forehead and a hint of worry on his face. It didn't seem like he had heard what the brainwight had just said.

Thank god...

Dàgē asked with concern, "Xiao Yu, are you okay?"

"This thing made me fall into an illusion again." I lied, pretending like I was desperately trying to hide my pain, "I saw things that I didn't want to see."

Dàgē fell silent for a moment before asking, "Was it about Guan Weijun?"

I nodded carelessly and snuck him a look. I never imagined that Dàgē would remember my name.

"Don't think too much." Dàgē reached out a hand, as though he were going to ruffle my hair, but reconsidered and pulled back his hand at the very last moment.

I frowned a little and remarked, "Everything should be fine now that we've dealt with this. We don't have to bother with digging up the evolution crystal for this aberrant because he doesn't have any. Dàgē, go look for your ammo. We should head back soon; otherwise Junjun will get worried."

Dàgē nodded and seemed almost eager to turn away and order the troop to split up for their tasks. For some reason, Xiao Sha was still in charge of following me. *Don't tell me I still haven't proven myself enough with my fighting ability so far, so they still think I need a bodyguard?*

With nothing to do, I just left the room and regretted it the moment I

stepped out through the door.

Lu Renjie had grabbed onto Chen Qianru, two hands tightly gripping her head, and he snarled, "If you take one step closer, I'm gonna snap her neck—"

Bang!

I had no expression whatsoever as I held out the gun, then tossed it back to Xiao Sha. This was a gun I had snatched from his waist holster just now.

Striding forward, I kicked aside Lu Renjie's corpse. Chen Qianru, the idiotic girl that she was, couldn't even break free of a corpse. Dying because you were crushed by a corpse rather than being bitten to death in the apocalypse was just about the most ridiculous and laughable death possible.

"Are you an idiot? The most worthless thing in the apocalypse is human life. So what do you think you're doing, threatening me with a random person?"

As Guan Weijun, I was a woman who had survived ten years in the apocalypse. In order to survive, just how many lives do you think I had abandoned or taken? Do you think I'm Mother Teresa, wanting to rescue every single person I come across?

I looked at the others, and they were just Su Ying, Ding Jun, and Chen Qianru. For some reason, Li Yarong had already turned into a corpse in one corner, and judging from how her brains had turned into mashed

tofu, it was likely that she had been killed by Lu Renjie when she tried to escape.

"What are your special abilities? Don't talk, just show me."

With that, I took out Xiao Sha's gun and pointed it at them three. To people in these early days, a gun was still much more threatening than special abilities.

Ding Jun remained as a grave as usual, though his color was a bit off. He probably wasn't a heartless person, but he was just naturally unable to show much emotion. *If he really has no heart to speak of, then I have to take him out as soon as possible!*

There was a saying that went: if they can live keeping their silence, then their silence damns them to abnormality. These days, such abnormalities were too dangerous, so it might be best to just kill him instead.

He grabbed at the remains of a metal shelf nearby, and then opened his palm, revealing a single screw that was flipping and turning in mid-air, floating a few centimeters away from his palm.

"Can you change its shape?" I asked coldly.

Ding Jun stared blankly, then shook his head. "No."

In theory, he should be able to, but it was likely that he was still too weak.

I looked at the two girls... never mind, I only had to look at Su Ying. Chen Qianru had already fainted, and I couldn't be bothered to wake her up.

Su Ying was sitting on the ground, so scared that her face was sheet-white, and she was covered from head to toe in blood. She could be featured in a horror movie looking like this. Terrified, she stammered, "I-I can't show you. M-my power isn't t-that kind. I, I can just hear people's thoughts s-sometimes. Really, only once in a while!"

I nodded. I had guessed it earlier. With psychic powers, she wasn't mesmerized by the brainwight, and she was even able to give me a warning, unlike Chen Qianru, the walking bait and rations who was so entranced that she couldn't make heads or tails of the time and how the events had played out.

"What about Chen Qianru?"

Su Ying shook her head. "I don't know."

I nodded, then crouched down and leaned in close to her ear. This move attracted Xiao Sha's attention and he looked over. *So what? I want to talk to her in secret, so bite me.*

"No matter what thoughts you hear from me, if you ever dare to tell them to anyone, including my Dàgē, you'll end up with the same fate as Lu Renjie. Understood?"

Her eyes brimming with tears, Su Ying trembled non-stop as she nodded, then joined Chen Qianru in the passed-out party.

In the end, we scavenged twelve boxes of all kinds of ammunition at the police station, along with twenty useless bullet-proof vests and all kinds of miscellanea that we weren't sure we needed, but which we took with us anyway.

There were also the three deadweight university students.

The secret behind how these people had been able to survive three months in the basement of a police station turned out to be not much of secret after all—there was another exit from the basement that was close to a supermarket. So these brainwight's rations had been living pretty well. Only when Lu Renjie had not been able to lure in passersby for some period of time did they need to consider which of them was going to become the next dish for the brainwight to enjoy.

The meet up that Chen Qianru had spoken about had actually happened, with its participants being the brainwight, Lu Renjie, Chen Qianru, Li Yarong, and a few others who had turned into aberrants and had gone god knows where. Su Ying and Ding Jun joined in afterwards and weren't part of the meet up.

This expedition could hardly be said to be fruitful, and if we factored in the loss of my ice staff as well, it was a tragic loss.

The moment I remembered my ice staff, I scowled deeply. Just when I was thinking of adding a spearhead—well, great, now even the spear shaft had disappeared. My head hurt just from the idea of having to start from scratch.

Back home, Shujun had said that she wanted to make sure her èrgē who had gone out on his first mission was being fed properly, so she cooked up enough medicinal dishes to cover the table. Of course, she didn't forget to include chicken soup and Chinese medicinal soup, so even my stomach hurt too.

During everyone's first experience with the brainwight today, they had all recalled painful things from their past, and so were incredibly spiritless. If not for the fact that we had to deal with the three university students, everyone would have probably gone back to their own rooms after the meal.

Actually, there were too few of us, so it was better to have some fresh blood to help out as well. But out of these three, Chen Qianru was spaced out, Ding Jun was dead silent, and Su Ying was extremely high-strung... *Fine, I'll admit the last one is my fault. I went a little overboard when scaring her just now.*

No matter how you looked at it, the three of them weren't fresh blood but deadweight. No one looked particularly pleased with them, but none of the mercenaries were so cruel as to throw them out to fend for themselves, given that we had adequate supplies at the moment. Dàgē spoke, "Shuyu, you will go to sleep with Shujun. They'll stay in your room."

I blinked, agreed with an "okay," and wanted to immediately head back to my room to pack my stuff. Besides, I had no lingering attachment to a room that was riddled with bullet holes, not to mention that it was where a bunch of people had died too.

To my surprise, Dàgē added, "It won't be for long. We'll clean up the house next door and knock down the fence, so that it will be connected to this side. Then everyone will be able to have a room to themselves."

"Okay." I glanced at him. Dàgē sure was talkative today.

Dàgē seemed to still have more to say so I stood there quietly, waiting for him to speak his mind. But in the end, he just waved a hand dismissively. "You're tired too. Go get some rest soon."

I nodded and returned to my room to sort out my stuff. Most importantly, I had to dig up all the weapons I had hidden around the room and hide them all again in Shujun's room.

Soon, I was sitting on my hospital bed, figuring out how the heck I was supposed to create a new weapon. Because it was hard to move the bed that was originally in my room, I just moved the hospital bed to Shujun's room instead. Anyhow, I had slept for a fair amount of time on this bed, so I was pretty used to it.

Shujun was patting dry her glistening hair as she exited the bathroom. Instead of drying it off with a hair dryer, she came directly to my bed and asked with puzzlement, "Èrgē, what happened today? Seems like everyone's pretty out of it. Even Dàgē's strange. He frowns whenever he looks at you."

I was silent for a while. *Don't tell me he heard those words anyway?*

"My ice staff is gone. Dàgē broke it, so I beat him up for that."

Unexpectedly, Shujun just blinked those large eyes of hers without the slightest bit of surprise. Moreover, she even nodded understandingly as she said, "No wonder Dàgē's so strange. He must feel super guilty. Had he broken anything else, he would have found you a replacement no matter what, but there's no way he can make an ice staff. Breaking something so valuable and not being able to replace it, well, *sigh*, I don't know how you will torment Dàgē this time."

She looked at me with her bright eyes and begged, "Èrgē, don't bully Dàgē too much. It's dangerous outside right now, so if you punish him too much, it might affect Dàgē's actual work when searching for supplies."

"...Did I punish Dàgē a lot in the past?"

That's absolutely ridiculous no matter how I think about it! How can a Jiang Shuyu with no special abilities punish Dàgē? Tell me, I want to learn!

Shujun pondered for a moment and then gave an example.

"Back then, Dàgē was always very busy. He'd rarely come home because he was always on business trips. Once, he promised to join my graduation ceremony, but he didn't turn up. I was still very young back then, and I couldn't help but cry during the ceremony. You were so angry that you changed all the locks in the house so Dàgē couldn't get in. That time, Dàgē had to stay at a hotel for a whole month. He couldn't enter the house nor could he just leave, because you told him, 'Dàgē, if you dare to leave the country, I'll immediately transfer away

all your savings, and move with Junjun to a place where you won't ever be able to find us.'"

The "run away with the savings" plan? Jiang Shuyu, how old were you back then? You really were something, knowing not only to make a clean escape, but to take all the money as well!

"Èrgē, you're normally very gentle, but you're very vicious when angered. Even Dàgē gets scared of you!" She giggled. "Actually, even Uncle and Auntie were punished by you before. They love going around to archaeological digs, and they'll go to the most dangerous of places, no matter how many times you tell them not to. Once, when they were dragged into a local conflict, Uncle got shot and Auntie fractured her leg. You would go hit Uncle and Auntie's wounds every night while they recovered at home, and you even said, 'It's best if these wounds never healed. Better to stay at home recovering from them than to die out there.'"

And so, I ended up listening to Shujun describe all kinds of things about Jiang Shuyu.

It was entirely possible that the actual master of this household was Jiang Shuyu, not Jiang Shutian as I had originally thought. Though that wasn't strictly true either. Jiang Shutian was the oldest brother who took over the father's role as the breadwinner of the family. Jiang Shuyu was the second brother who took over the mother's role as caretaker of the siblings and his uncle and auntie. What hardworking kids.

Can I even compare in terms of hard work?

"Èrgē," Shujun pressed her forehead against mine, "don't worry, you'll definitely remember."

I stroked the back of her head, feeling the silky smoothness of the raven black hair, and instructed her, "Go dry your hair. Don't sleep with wet hair, or you'll get a headache."

"Okay." She slipped off the hospital bed and skipped over agilely to pick up the hair dryer. Then, she started drying her hair after holding onto the socket—her control over her lightning ability truly a marvel to behold.

But Shujun, I can't remember. I'll never remember anything.



I repeatedly compressed ice crystals, but after a whole day of work, there still was only a thin layer of ice coating the staff. I really wasn't doing much than just polishing the broom handle. There was at least a whole month of work ahead of me before I could even get anything approaching an ice staff again. But whatever, this time, I would work on it together with the spear head, so the connecting point between the spear shaft and head wouldn't be too fragile.

"Èrgē, time for dinner!"

"Okay," I replied, then headed over to the dining room. There were only Uncle, Auntie, Junjun, and the three university students sitting at the table.

To keep an eye on the three new faces in the house and because my ice staff had been melted, I just conveniently stayed home to work on my weapon, opting not to join the others in their resupply mission. The target this time was the supermarket next to the police station.

Although Shujun could zap all three of them dead with a bolt of lightning, there was no way I was letting Shujun get her hands dirty. Frying someone with lightning would make them crispy on the outside but leave tender, succulent meat on the inside—but whatever reason you could come up with, it was still a no go. Or at least, there wasn't any need for Junjun to take the stage right now.

The three university students were originally eyeing the food on the table hungrily, but the moment they saw me, their complexions changed. This was especially true for the two girls, who looked at me like I was a demon. *As if there were any demons as handsome as me. Hmph, my good looks are wasted on you.*

"Shuyu, come eat." Auntie tugged at my hand. She seemed to be in a good mood, and even smiled at the three university students as she said, "Eat up, everyone. You don't need to be shy. You're all Xiao Yu's classmates. Don't hold back."

Actually, only Chen Qianru was my classmate, but I couldn't care less since I didn't know any of them anyway.

The three university students immediately dove into the dishes, abandoning all pretenses of manners and going at the food like they'd been starving for three months. Technically, that was likely the case—even though they had a supermarket nearby, they had no way of

cooking up meals when they had no electricity or fire. And even if they did have electricity and fire, they probably could only cook instant noodles.

I watched the three closely, Chen Qianru in particular. I still didn't know what her special ability was, so I'd better ask her afterwards. Chen Qianru started feeling uncomfortable under my stare, and she had wanted to run away a few times. At the same time, she didn't dare to move from her seat under my gaze. As she grew more and more anxious, she suddenly threw out a question. "Jiang Shuyu, do you still remember Miao Xiangling?"

I glanced at her, suppressing the rumbling volcano inside of me, and decided that the next time she asked another question like 'do you still remember so-and-so?' I'd beat the wits out of her so she wouldn't remember anything.

"Nope."

Chen Qianru went "oh" and still plowed on, "She was always feeling very guilty, and she didn't even dare to go visit you at the hospital." *Guilty about what?* I was totally confused. *Did the tile drop from the roof of her house?*

"You were actually going to meet up with her that day."

So my ex-girlfriend really has shown up? My expression darkened instantly. Seeing the two girls who were so frightened that they were about to bolt from the dining table, I barked, "Sit down!"

Chen Qianru and Su Ying immediately sat down, backs straight and proper, like they were long-extinct noble ladies from the past.

Actually, I didn't want to learn about my ex-girlfriend, but seeing as Shujun, Uncle, and Auntie's eyes were shining so brightly, it was best that I got it over with. Otherwise, I'd end up being the only person in the family who didn't know who my ex-girlfriend was.

"Miao Xiangling was my girlfriend?"

Chen Qianru shook her head immediately, then hesitated, before saying, "She was the school's Madonna, and she had already told everyone early on that she wanted to get together with you, the school's Prince Charming. This was very famous and the entire school knew about it."

What a bold and passionate school Madonna. The school's Prince Charming concedes his defeat.

"Then did she get my èrgē in the end?" Shujun pushed at me unhappily, complaining, "Èrgē, you never told me that you had a girlfriend."

You're blaming me? Even I didn't know Jiang Shuyu had a girlfriend.

"No, no! They hadn't started dating yet." Chen Qianru hastily corrected her, "Jiang Shuyu said he needed to get into university, so he didn't have time to date a girlfriend. He said he'd think about it once he finished his exams, so that was their first time going out. But in the end, Miao Xiangling kept waiting and waiting with no sign of Jiang

Shuyu. She thought that he had stood her up and kept cursing him for days! But later she found out that Jiang Shuyu had gotten into an accident precisely on the day that they had arranged to meet up."

Hearing that, Shujun, Uncle, and Auntie's expressions darkened. Although that accident had nothing to do with Miao Xiangling, it was difficult not to get upset when it involved your family member's life.

Chen Qianru realized that this wasn't a good topic to discuss, so she hastily tried to smooth over her mistake, "Um, anyway, Jiang Shuyu is fine anyhow."

You mean he's dead.

"What do you mean, 'fine'?! " Shujun pouted and grumbled, "You only think that because you hadn't seen what Èrgē looked like before—he was as thin as a stick! He looked so pitiful and sorry, and we had to nurse him for a long time before he looked like this again."

None of the three dared to say anything to that. Su Ying even stared daggers at Chen Qianru, her glare clearly saying, *'why'd you have to tick them off?'*

But Chen Qianru was clearly an idiot, and she still continued her line of questioning, "Jiang Shuyu, you woke up before the apocalypse, right? But I don't remember hearing about it."

"I woke up three days before the apocalypse."

"You managed to survive that night?" The normally taciturn Ding Jun

opened his mouth and said with full respect, "No wonder you're so strong."

Shujun immediately puffed up and boasted, "My èrgē didn't just survive the night, he even picked up a baseball bat to fight an aberrant. He saved the whole family!"

"Aberrant?" Ding Jun paused. "You mean those zombies?"

Zombie, my ass. They're alive and they evolve much faster than humans. If you don't get serious now, you'll be overtaken by the zombies—wait, I mean the aberrants. Why did I start calling them zombies as well?

Although at the beginning of the apocalypse, many people called them "zombies" or the "living dead," they quickly discovered that neither were quite the right terms. Those "zombies" not only didn't rot, but also evolved to be stronger and stronger. If a corpse could evolve faster than a living person, then humanity might as well all hang themselves and get it done and over with.

So then, they switched to the word "monster." Later, once those "monsters" started talking, a new term surfaced – "aberrant" – and that was how the name stuck. I felt that, in this life, things should be pretty much the same. Or at least, up until now, this world was going down a fairly similar path as the original one.

"Èrgē, don't worry." Shujun watched me with worry and said consolingly, "Maybe your girlfriend is still alive!"

I'm wishing she were dead!

"Don't be silly, we didn't even go out once, so she's not my girlfriend."
Shujun stuck out her tongue, saying, "Fine, she's not if Èrgē says she's not. I originally wanted to say at least you've dated before."

What do you mean, 'dated before?' Don't make it sound like no one wants me, okay? I've said it a million times before and I'll say it again, with Jiang Shuyu's looks, there's not a single woman out there who won't fall for him. He's unrivaled the moment he lifts his head!

Chen Qianru and Su Ying screamed and fled the table like it was a sinking ship.

"..."

That's not the way it should have played out.

Shujun cracked up.

"Come back here!" I growled. *I still don't know what Chen Qianru's powers are!*

The two girls quivered as they returned and quivered as they sat, then quivered as they looked down, not daring to look me in the eye. I decided to give up on healing their mental trauma and got to the point.

"Chen Qianru, what's your special ability? Don't say it, show me."
Chen Qianru said quietly, "I don't have any."

I remained silent, thinking hard as to whether or not she was lying. As it turned out, the silence seemed to freak her out again and she immediately lifted her head, exclaiming, "It's true! I don't have anything. If you don't believe me, ask Ding Jun and Su Ying. I really don't have any abilities!"

This was actually consistent with what Su Ying had said before, and from when we had first met, I had never felt any trace of energy waves from her. Perhaps she was the same as Uncle and Auntie in that they all had very hard to detect powers, but if that were the case, it seemed like it wouldn't be a bad idea to keep her around for her potential.

I nodded, pondering as to what to do with the three of them. Although they were deadweights, they should be able turn into fresh blood for us with a little training. Now, the question came down to the degree of their loyalty.

If we trained them, then them running away was the least of our concerns. It would be a pain if they were planning to take over, but the worst case scenario would be if they stabbed us in the back. *I could never let that happen!*

"What about your families?"

Ding Jun shook his head. "I'm from an orphanage and became independent when I turned eighteen. I'm now twenty and have to take care of myself. That's why I went to work in the supermarket. I was trapped there for almost one month, then I got caught by Lu Renjie." *No ties whatsoever. Good, we'll take this one!*

I looked at Su Ying. She was the psychic type, and although I didn't know much about the theory behind our special abilities, I knew that such people were extremely rare and, more often than not, useful. So if there weren't any problems with her, let's keep her.

Su Ying shivered, then said softly, "Dead, one ate the other ..."

Her voice became so quiet when she mentioned which parent ate which that I couldn't make out a word she said, but I didn't mind at all. In the apocalyptic world, the biggest wound that people could never bear to talk about was the case where family ate family.

Chen Qianru's eyes reddened, and she choked back tears as she said, "I don't know. My family's in Zhongguan City and there's no way we can get back there."

They all seemed fine. But actually, the reason everything was fine was thanks to Dàgē's mercenaries. In my previous life... well, it didn't really count as a previous life anymore. Anyway, back when I was Guan Weijun, there wasn't much personal space within the group, so even though we spent all day running for our lives, there were always people who wanted to be the leader, people who coveted other people's things, or even people who wanted to take advantage of women—in a word, it was "chaos." Even when sleeping, I would fret about being stabbed by someone and having my strawberry bread taken away from me.

But now, Dàgē's mercenary troop was too overpowered, so these three university students had no way of stirring up any trouble.

Want to play leader? If they're already shaking in their boots when they see me, do they even dare to face Dàgē?

Want to stab us to death? Every person in the troop handles knives better than them, so they would be better off learning how to first chop cabbage with a vegetable knife!

Want to steal my strawberry bread? The whole table is covered with plates of fish and meat, so they aren't starved in the slightest. Why would they even need to steal bread?

Want to take advantage of women? We have Lily, the ambidextrous shooter; Ceng Yunqian, our one-shot-one-kill sniper and Shujun, the expert at manipulating lightning. If you're asking to be killed, I'm telling you, you'd absolutely get slaughtered. Don't say I didn't warn you!

And who really cared about second lives? The biggest cheat code is having Dàgē!

"Èrgē, why don't you go daydream in our room?" Shujun gave me a friendly suggestion, "With you here, none of them dare to even lift a finger. I feel so sorry for them, sitting there so stiffly and all."

I silently stood up, turned, and headed back to our room.

From behind came Chen Qianru's terrified voice, saying, "Jiang Shuyu's became so scary! He used to be so kind in the past, and he had even taught everyone how to do problem sets before exams. He'd

never refuse to help if you had questions either!"

This woman really is an idiot. Is it too late for me to throw her out of here?

Shujun said excitedly, "Oh, that was before you pissed off my èrgē. I'm telling you, my èrgē is scarier than my dàgē! There was once a time when..."

Shujun, you've not only given up on healing their mental trauma, you're sprinkling chili powder over their wounds. What kind of impression would they have of me from now on? Sigh, whatever, it's rare that anyone thinks I'm mightier than Dàgē. Since this is such a rare opportunity, I'll let them worship the cool, suave, and handsome me.

I returned to my room to continue my handicraft.

First, I split open a fissure at the head of the well-polished broomstick handle, then took apart a dagger, keeping only the blade. Then, I wedged the blade in the fissure and bound it tightly with metal wire, thus completing the basic shape of a spear. Yup, to call this shape ugly would be quite an understatement.

If I'd woken up earlier, I'd have spent a fortune trying to get hold of a real spear. Unfortunately, I'd woken up too late, so I was left with just a broomstick and a worthless dagger. *This would have to make do.*

I started the long, arduous process of repeatedly compressing the ice crystals. The next few days were a continuation of this dry, tedious work. Had I known that going to the police station would turn out like this, I would have resolutely insisted on working solo from the very

beginning.

The only good thing that came out of this was that Shujun seemed very happy, and she would always be chit-chatting with Chen Qianru and Su Ying. Although these two were older than her by a few years, well, girls will be girls, and could always find shared interests.

For example, between Dàgē and Cain, which of them had C-cup sized pecs; whether Èrgē or Xiao Sha had a slimmer waist; which of them three Yunqian would like the most—no, none of these topics were at all like girl talk.

I facepalmed, not knowing where I had gone wrong with her education.

Although I wanted to yell at Chen Qianru and Su Ying for being a bad influence on my Junjun, the problem was that the person doing the corrupting was my Junjun.

So after a dìdì's image of his gēge is destroyed, will a dìdì's image of his mèimei meet its apocalyptic end as well...?

Whatever, isn't it the end of the world already?

Footnotes

¹ **"LV"**: Stands for Louis Vuitton, a famous French brand.

² **"Asura"**: Asura, in Hindu mythology, are supernatural beings akin to demigods in western mythologies who vie for power with the more benevolent devas. Asuras were initially good, virtuous and powerful in Indian mythology. However, their nature gradually changed and they came to represent evil, vice and abuse of power. In Shiva Purana, they evolved into anti-gods and had to be destroyed because they threatened the gods.

Chapter 2: The Bitterness and Sweetness of Coffee and Chocolate

As my hands worked to compress the ice crystals, my ears picked up gossip like, "Èrgē is so handsome, both men and women fall for him. Dàgē even said that he isn't sure about his preferences!" On the fifth day of my despair over her upbringing, there was finally a little change.

After dinner, Dàgē grimly called me to his room for a chat. Everyone in the mercenary troop looked at Dàgē, and then at me. Going by the looks of worry on their faces, it was as if the two of us weren't going to have a chat, but a death match instead.

I nodded and followed after Dàgē as the sounds of gossip came from behind again, though this time it wasn't the voices of the girls, but of the mercenaries.

"Do you think the gēge or the dìdi will win?"

"Before, I'd definitely declare that Boss would be the victor, but Shuyu was pretty strong last time! I mean, he sent Boss crashing into the wall with a kick!"

"Don't tell me the person who's boss is gonna change?"

"Fuck! Then gēge, do your best! I don't want an eighteen year-old boss."

It wasn't just my mèimei. Even the mercenaries' upbringings were failures.

I angrily stormed after Dàgē to his room.

Once in the room, Dàgē was momentarily stunned when he turned to look at me, then he said helplessly, "Shuyu, don't be so angry. You've been scowling at me for the past few days."

I growled, "I'm very angry!"

You actually told Junjun that I'm not sure about my sexual orientation! Even though that's true, you don't have to tell this kind of stuff to a fifteen year-old girl, okay? Junjun's upbringing is ruined, thanks to you!

Dàgē said awkwardly, "I'll pay you back."

"There's no point!" Junjun's upbringing was already ruined, so what can you pay me back with? You think you can repay me a pure Junjun?

Dàgē frowned, seemingly to have realized something, and then said simply, "Then tell me, what can I do? I can't make you an ice staff, so I'll do my best to get you anything else you want."

...Ice staff?

Right, so we're on completely different wavelengths. I'm talking about Junjun, and you're talking about the ice staff. Our thought processes aren't even operating in the same realm, so no wonder we can't get through to each other!

Although the ice staff had melted, forcing me to start anew, honestly speaking, that ice staff had been my first attempt. It looked like a test product, and its quality was mediocre. Although I felt that it could still be used for the next year or so, seeing as it was already destroyed, I might as well create a new one. I could use the opportunity to add on a spearhead, so I actually didn't mind it too much. I never imagined that Dàgē would be more worked up about it than I was.

I shook my head, saying, "Forget about the staff."

Dàgē started, then asked in bewilderment, "Forget about it? Then what on earth have you been angry about the past few days?"

Angry about what? I immediately roared, "Never talk to Junjun about my sexual orientation ever again!"

"...Oh." Dàgē's eyes drifted evasively off into the distance.

"...What else did you tell Junjun?"

"..."

"What. Did. You. Say?"

"I just mentioned that Xiao Sha might be a good partner for you."

"JIANG SHUTIAN!"

You're an absolute criminal to people's upbringings! No wonder I keep

hearing about waist lines and who's topping who. I thought Junjun was talking about naughty stuff, so I've spent the past few days fretting about whether I should correct her. But being a total mess myself, there's no way I'm in any position to tell anyone off. I've been so stressed about this whole thing the past few days, I've lost a lot of hair, you know!

My anger having settled into a pool of icy calmness, I said coldly, "Dàgē, I've thought of a way you can repay me."

"Um, it's late now. Let's discuss tomorrow."

"Stand right here and don't move for the next half an hour. That's a simple enough punishment for you, right?" I completely ignored him, flexing my wrists and moving my ankles in circles, as I started doing warm-up exercises earnestly.

Dàgē watched me and said with absolute seriousness, "There's still a scavenging mission tomorrow."

"You're a healing type. You'll be fine."

I threw a punch.



Whew~ I strolled out of the room, and the first thing I saw was the group of mercenaries crouching in the corner, clearly eavesdropping.

"What're you crouching there for? Don't you have actual things to do?" The mercenaries responded in unison, "No, Boss."

My voice cooled and I said in frosty tones, "Your boss is in there, healing up. You want to join him?"

"No, Boss."

I thought it over. *Yup, maybe I should train up this lot a little. I can't just neglect the mercenaries' upbringing.* So I headed back to my room immediately to pick up my ice staff. Although I'd only been working on it for five days, it would be enough to beat up some people.

We assembled in the garden at the back of the house. The mercenaries were standing in orderly rows, and even the three deadweights weren't forgotten—every one of them stood ramrod straight, fairly deliberately. Every so often, they would let slip the odd guffaw when they couldn't hold back their laughter anymore.

I spoke. "It has only been a little over three months into the apocalypse. I had originally felt that you'd be fine even without knowing how to use your powers—after all, these are still times when machine guns are much more practical than special abilities. But we encountered a brainwight a few days ago, and even that Lu Renjie was better than you lot are at using his own powers. You do realize that there's no way he has eaten more evolution crystals than you have, right? So I feel like things are looking pretty bad."

Everyone started to sober up and no longer stood so stiffly. Finally, they were taking things more seriously.

"Shujun's way better than you at controlling her powers." I watched

them—they didn't seem to have much reaction to this news. *Seems like I need to make more of an impact.* "Or perhaps you think Shujun's powers are only good for charging electronics."

I turned to look at Shujun, then pointed at a tree in the garden and said, "Cut down a branch."

Shujun blinked and lifted a hand, looking like nothing more than a gentle girl reaching out for help. But suddenly, a bolt of bright light shot from her forefinger, and there was a loud *crack* of snapping wood. Everyone's eyes widened, and they quickly spun around to look at the tree. A chunk of the tree's dense foliage was missing, and there was even white smoke rising from it. Lying on the ground were the charred remains of a single branch.

She was able to take down precisely one branch—no more and no less. This was why I always said that Shujun's skill with lightning was godlike, and this was by no means an exaggeration.

Both Dàgē and I didn't want Shujun to have to fight, but this didn't mean that I'd let her be completely helpless either. If anyone dared to bully my xiǎomèi, they would definitely end up crispy on the outside, tender on the inside, and smelling of roast.

Everyone tore their eyes away from the blackened branch with great difficulty and all stared at me and Shujun, their eyes shining so brightly that you could use them as flashlights.

"Wanna learn?" I quirked my lips in a slight smile, intentionally tantalizing them with the question. *I was seen as a joke before, but*

now? Heh, now it's my turn to hear you scream!

"Yes, Boss!"

"Shut up, I don't want to be Boss."

"Yes, Boss Jr.!"

...I really have to do something about these mercenaries' upbringing.

I hefted the ice staff. When I was teaching Shujun, I had to be gentle, so there was no way I could do something as brutal as freezing her using ice energy. I had to spend a lot of time and effort in order to make Shujun this amazing at using her abilities. But this lot standing in front of me wasn't my own mèimei. Not only were they thick-skinned, burly mercenaries, they were ones with terrible upbringings!

"Split up into groups of two and try to block my ice staff with your powers; otherwise, you'll be frozen into a popsicle! If you can't take the cold and want to hit me, bring it on. For every punch you throw, I'll return the favor ten times over. For every kick you make, I'll break a bone. Besides, we've got Dàgē here anyway, so I don't have to worry about crippling any of you."

"Crippling"? Everyone turned to look at the person standing behind me, their puzzled expressions asking the unsaid question, "Why does Boss still have black eyes then?"

Yes, so I specifically aim for the face when I hit people. Bite me.

After thinking for a moment, I said, "Cain, come over for a demonstration."

He grumbled as he walked up to the front, "I knew you hated me."

"Your ability is fire, so in theory, you should be resistant to my ice powers."

Seriously, I'm not taking revenge in the name of conducting business this time.

"Even if that's true," the jackass still continued his line of complaints, "you still hate me."

After a moment of silence, I stopped caring anymore and yelled, "Yeah, I hate you! You were the one who just watched me leave the house without stopping me previously. You didn't even care if I lived or died!"

"Huh? Why would I stop you from leaving the house?" he shot back with a question of his own, confused.

Still pretending to be innocent? I raged, "Don't you think it'd be dangerous if I went out by myself? I'm just an eighteen year-old kid!"

I ignored all the gazes around me that were saying, *"Yeah, it's really dangerous. For the aberrants, that is."*

"We made all the aberrants nearby the last in their family line."

You don't use "last in the family line" that way!

Cain continued, saying, "And you're eighteen already. Shouldn't you already know where you should and shouldn't go?" like it was the most natural thing in the world.

"..." I felt like our thought processes were running in different directions again.

Cain patted my shoulder, revealing brilliant white teeth as he grinned. "It's okay, Yunqian hates me too. So, having one more person doesn't make much difference. Just don't hit my face, okay? Boss's black eyes give him character, but I don't need it as well. Let's just let the Boss keep it, yeah?"

...Why, how generous of you.

I suddenly felt that my mind had narrowed even more in its petty-mindedness. Although I'd been bearing a grudge for such a long time against a super soldier whose smile was worthy of toothpaste commercials, he had never born any ill intentions toward me.

The tips of my ears felt hot. I snapped back in pretend anger, "It's the apocalypse now, so all this business of hating or not isn't important. Staying alive is the most important. So I'll make sure to train you well," trying to make up for my petty-mindedness.

Then, I forcefully gripped Cain's arm and channeled my ice power.

A muscular, macho man screamed at the top of his voice, "AHHhhHHHHHHhh—it's cold, it's *super* cold! Please don't hate me.

Please let goooooo!"

What the hell are you screaming your head off for? Where are your balls? Look at that... Yunqian, she didn't even make a sound! Now that's what I call a real man!

Then again, she did have the water ability, which is fairly strong at adapting to ice powers.

I made every one of the mercenaries scream, working my way from one end of the row to the other and back again. I didn't let the three deadweights off either, and even the normally dead silent Ding Jun yelled a lot in agony. Fortunately, Dàgē and the others had cleared out the aberrants in the vicinity a while ago, otherwise we'd definitely be waist deep in aberrants from the way these guys were screaming bloody murder.

It was only when I'd wrung out every drop of my ice powers that I finally announced to everyone, "That's the end of today's training session."

Everyone acted like I was pronouncing that they had been spared the death sentence. They were so happy that they started crying and laughing at the same time, and there wasn't a single shred of a professional mercenary anywhere to be seen.

I headed back, picking up the ice staff that I had left to one side on the way, and only then did I remember that I had used up all my powers. This meant I would make zero progress on my ice staff today. If I kept training these mercenaries like this, then I might as well

forget about crafting my ice spear.

Thinking back, everyone had participated in the training today, even Uncle and Auntie. If I had made Uncle and Auntie scream in such agony before the apocalypse, I'd have taken the crown for being the most unfilial, abusive child and reigned supreme for a lifetime. But now, well, hah, I'd even get thanked for teaching them.

Out of everyone, only Shujun didn't participate. She no longer needed this kind of basic training. Perhaps I could get Shujun to take over half the training and specialize in teaching those who fall behind in progress.

"In the future, Shujun and I will be your trainers. So split yourselves into two groups..."

The space around me cleared instantly, and everyone clustered over on Shujun's side. I gave a cold laugh.

"Shujun, why don't you give it a try first?" I pointed at Yunqian. Just now, she was the one who had had it the easiest, and she hadn't even made a sound, making her the real man of the day.

Shujun nodded, gently held Yunqian's hand, and even revealed a cute smile.

"Yunqian-jiě, I'm starting now!"

In the end, even the last real man in the mercenary troop disappeared.
Very good! Now time to wash up and go to bed.



I walked out of the bathroom, and just as I was about to ask Shujun to help me blow dry my hair, I saw Dàgē. The mighty god of men was sitting on a pink floral bed with a backdrop of lavender colored wallpaper, his eyes still black with bruises.

Dàgē, do you realize that you've completely destroyed your own image?

Wait, why does the thing Dàgē is fiddling with look so familiar...?

"Let go of that spear!" I yelled quickly.

Although this baby's only five-days old, five days are still five days! I had even planned on working on it for two more days before using it for a hunt. If it gets melted into a puddle of water again, I'll, I'll... I really don't know what to do against a Dàgē who's completely fine with meeting people with two black eyes.

Dàgē lifted his head and asked, "So, Xiao Yu, you like using long spears? What about swords or knives? It shouldn't be hard to find a decent blade."

All right, I know that spear is fugly, but please let go of it first? I beg you, spare its life!

Dàgē finally set the long spear on the bed, prompting a sigh of relief from me. Only then did I respond, "Back then, the only weapon I had that could be used in the beginning was a vegetable knife tied to a

long stick. After using it for a while, I kind of got used to it. I mean, I also know how to use blades, but I'm better at wielding staves."

Everyone wanted to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the aberrants. If not for the fact that bullets were in short supply, no one would duke it out with the aberrants mano a aberranto. So naturally, the longer the weapon, the better. The best weapon was one which lets you stab to death an aberrant from far, far away, so a long stick was the best makeshift weapon out there. Later on, I became very proficient at using long staves, and that had carried over to here.

Dàgē nodded. "Then, I'll try to find you a long spear."

"It's okay, long spears are hard to find. This weapon is temporary anyway."

"Temporary? Then what's the actual one?"

"A long spear and dagger made from only compressed ice crystals." I drew out a piece of ice from my breast pocket. It was only half the size of my palm and extremely thin, no more than the thickness of three to four sheets of paper. But this thin piece of ice was strong enough to block a blow from the five day-old long spear, or even the one month-old ice staff from before.

However, I was only able to create such a small piece so far, so I always kept it over my heart for protection. In the future, it would become my secondary weapon, the dagger. And once I become more proficient with the technique of creating and compressing ice crystals,

I would make my main weapon, the long spear. This process would probably take over five years. It couldn't be rushed.

Dàgē took that shard of ice and flipped it over and over, knocking it every so often. He too realized the exceptional hardness of the ice shard, and he gave a sigh of admiration, "Xiao Yu, you really are something."

I didn't think I deserved the praise. Had it been Dàgē who had been reborn, he'd probably have conquered half the continent by now. *As for me? I'm still creating a newbie weapon, so what's there to be proud of?*

But Dàgē, what do you want to talk about in the middle of the night? Hurry up, Junjun needs the room back for sleeping—staying up late is the bane of beauty!

Dàgē looked over at me, and I couldn't help but blurt out, "Dàgē, just make those black eyes go away!"

"What now? You're the one who gave them to me, and now *you* can't even stand looking at me?" Dàgē said wryly, but he vanished the black eyes in a blink of the eye all the same.

Dàgē's powers really were strange. They just didn't match up with the powers of healing. Back then, Xiao Qi's healing abilities were nowhere as powerful, not to mention she could never melt my ice staff. But I couldn't figure out what kind of power could both heal wounds and melt an ice staff.

Then again, Guan Weijun was a frog in the well. She had never encountered any of the higher-tiered powers. A lot of things she knew were all from rumors and hearsay, so there was no way of knowing how much of them were true.

The advantages of being reincarnated would probably last no more than one or two years. If the Jiang family continued this streak of super bad luck, then I'm afraid even the cheat known as reincarnation wouldn't be enough!

Tier one aberrants, Lu Renjie, the brainwight... none of them were things we were supposed to encounter at this stage of the apocalypse.

"Cain was born in the slums, and children there grow up fast. To him, an eighteen year-old boy like you is already a full-fledged adult, and therefore should be responsible for your own safety. He didn't have any other intentions."

I looked at Dàgē. *So he's here to explain Cain's actions back then.*

"I was a little angry myself at him for that last incident. But after discussing this with the others, we felt that all the aberrants nearby had been wiped out, and we didn't expect you to go too far, based on the duration of your trips and the amount of supplies you brought back. So we decided to let you head out for a breath of fresh air; otherwise, your temper tantrums would worsen the more bored you became."

After some thought, I finally got it. Jiang Shuyu didn't know how to drive, so from their point of view, even if I had stolen a car, I had no way of starting the engine without the ignition key. So they used my

walking speed to estimate the distance I could cover. But as it turned out, I had in fact driven instead of walked.

So the incident mostly boiled down to misunderstandings. At first, I had pissed off the mercenaries when I had hidden the existence of evolution crystals from them, so everyone likewise treated me very antagonistically. Then everything that followed made me think of things in the worst light possible.

"Dàgē, am I really that petty-minded?" I asked, a little dejected. *Was Guan Weijun such a petty-minded and rotten woman that she couldn't forgive any trespasses against her, any more than she could tolerate a grain of sand in her eye?*

Dàgē ruffled my hair and said indulgently, "You've lived in the apocalypse for ten years, so don't ask too much of yourself. Just speak out if you have any questions or problems in the future. Keeping it all bottled up inside only makes matters worse."

"..." I was silent and continued to keep my silence, until I finally couldn't hold back and demanded accusingly, "Dàgē, why did you pour away my coffee back then? Did you really think I would poison you?"

A look of embarrassment crossed Dàgē's face, and he explained feebly, "There was one time when I teased you a bit too much, so that night, you brought me a cup of coffee. The next day, I had such bad diarrhea that I couldn't make it onto my flight, and I was forced to delay a very important mission."

...Jiang Shuyu, you really are something! You actually dared to give

laxatives to Dàgē. I feel like even my triumph of giving Dàgē two black eyes when he was feeling too guilty to fight back pales in comparison!

"You were only twelve that year," Dàgē admitted with a look like he was suffering from a massive headache, "and your expression as you brought in the coffee was exactly the same as back then, so I didn't dare to drink it."

As it turns out, I was sold out by the Shuyu of the past. How is it possible to get tripped up this badly by yourself?

"But I won't say that the thought that you would poison me had never crossed my mind." Dàgē stopped abruptly, then clarified, "And I'm not talking about the harmless kinds of poison like laxatives."

I started.

"Actually, if you hadn't told me about Guan Weijun, Shujun and I would probably have never noticed anything wrong with you. We would have thought that you had just lost your memories." Dàgē said wryly, "So your confession actually planted a seed of suspicion in me that would sprout up from time to time. So back then, when you were kicking up a fuss, I couldn't help but over think the matter. And it was only a cup of coffee, so I didn't think it would be a big deal and poured it away."

That was certainly true. If it was just a cup of coffee, tipping it away wasn't much of an issue. But it meant that he had suspicions about me, and now that the seed of suspicion had been planted, would it grow to blossom and bear fruit?

Back then, I still had hope, hope that Guan Weijun was Jiang Shuyu's previous incarnation, hope that I had just forgotten about Jiang Shuyu, hope that I really was Jiang Shuyu!

But Jiang Shuyu was dead, and now my heart was colder and more frigid than my ice powers.

"Shuyu." Dàgē looked at me very seriously. "Many people were resuscitated after their hearts stopped. Are you saying that they aren't who they used to be?"

I knew it. He heard it. I clenched my fists.

"You don't have to force yourself to be 'Jiang Shuyu.'"

So he found that out too.

Jiang Shuyu was very easy-going, and you could even say that he was sometimes a goodie-two-shoes. But actually, he wasn't afraid of Dàgē in the slightest, and once angered, he would even dare to hit his Uncle's and Auntie's wounds.

This was the Jiang Shuyu that Shujun had described.

Am I like him?

Jiang Shuyu isn't afraid of Dàgē, but I...

"Dàgē, I've always been scared of you."

Dàgē stiffened and his expression sank, but at the same time, he didn't look too surprised. I guessed he had been able to tell, even though my recent beating up of him was pretty much like I was playing around, in order to be the "Jiang Shuyu" who wasn't afraid of his dàgē.

"Why are you scared of me? I've never hurt you."

I remained silent for a long while, but in the end, I still steeled myself to confess, "Ever since I woke up, I knew I was Guan Weijun. The nicer you guys were to me, the more scared I became of you guys discovering the truth. Then, I finally couldn't stand the pressure anymore and told you everything. But after confessing everything, I started to worry again. Maybe someday, you'll throw aside the idea of past and current lives and no longer think of me as your dìdi. And then you'll strangle me to death!"

"Never!" Dàgē roared, "Shuyu, just how much do you doubt me? I'm your dàgē, and I would *never* hurt you!"

Looking at Dàgē's expression of fury, I really wanted to say, "*Dàgē, why don't you just throttle the life out of me right now? Otherwise, when the whole world is telling you that I'm 'not Jiang Shuyu,' you will still have to treat me as your dìdi, your real dìdi!*"

But I couldn't bring myself to say it. It was asking for the impossible—the *current Jiang Shutian would never be able to strangle me to death, right?* Right now, I had Jiang Shuyu's appearance, and there was no way he could kill his own dìdi when he had no way of being sure of just

who was inside this body.

I gazed at him for several moments, then declared decisively, "Dàgē, you only need to suspect me one more time—just once!—and I will leave both you and Shujun. We'll never see each other again. That'll be the best for all of us."

When I said that, Dàgē shuddered, and he said dryly, "I'm not god. Do you honestly expect your dàgē to never make mistakes?"

"You made a mistake with the coffee, and I didn't leave," I said stubbornly, "so if you make any more mistakes, it means you don't believe me. And since I'm such a petty-minded person, I'll never let that go. I don't want to be the brother of someone who's suspicious of me and someone I'm afraid of!"

"Well said!" Dàgē nodded in agreement. His eyes softened as he gazed at me, taking a real, good, hard look as though looking at his own dìdi for the first time.

Taking in a deep breath, he said in a steady voice, "You really are Shuyu. There's no mistake about it. Shujun's always been better than me at judging people, and she's never suspected you."

My eyes suddenly flooded with heat. *No, this can't do.* I hastily blinked a few times, trying to suppress the stinging in my eyes.

All right, then Jiang Shuyu is Jiang Shuyu! As long as Dàgē believes in me and Shujun believes in me, I'll believe that I am Jiang Shuyu!

If their belief is misplaced or the truth comes to light, perhaps I'll still be able to run away then. Or perhaps I really would be strangled to death, but anything is better than spending day and night fretting about the trustworthiness of the people beside you. I've had enough of those days in my previous life. Now that I've finally gotten a new chance at life and even a family who'll never doubt each other, how can I afford to make the same mistake again?!

Dàgē reached out and ruffled my hair, saying, "Don't worry, Dàgē will protect you all."

My eyes got hot again. *Dàgē, stop talking, okay?*

But even if the waterworks were threatening to burst, I still couldn't resist asking, "My personality really hasn't changed?"

At least Jiang Shuyu couldn't possibly be as much of a cry baby as I am?

I was starting to find his personality very peculiar, especially since I was a woman. *If I have a similar character as a man's, is it Guan Weijun who was too tomboyish or is it Jiang Shuyu who was too girly...?* Then again, normally, a thirty-five year old woman in the apocalypse should be more generous and forgiving than an eighteen year-old kid who had lived comfortably all his life.

Dàgē said slowly and methodically, "Not by much, so you don't have to keep pretending. When you're pretending, it makes me feel like something's not quite right, like how overly lively you've been the past few days."

I see. Zero points for the unnatural acting.

"There is one thing that's changed from before."

"What is it?" I grew a little curious but also a little anxious at the same time. But I tried to tell myself not to worry too much about it. *In any case, Dàgē and Shujun both believe me, so what's there to be afraid of?*

Dàgē's mouth quirked a smile, and he said with amusement, "You didn't used to sneak looks at my chest and abs."

...So he's noticed me sneaking peeks at him long ago! Shit, isn't this too much of a difference? Jiang Shuyu definitely wouldn't be drooling over men's chests, right?!

"You would always just look at it directly."

"..." Fine, you win, Jiang Shuyu. Forget race horses, you're so far ahead of me that I couldn't even catch you on a rocket. You're just a huge pervert who's both a sis-con and a bro-con!

Dàgē ruffled my hair, explaining, "You were always very jealous of my muscles, and you had even said that, after your exams, you would buy a bunch of fitness machines to train your body to be as muscular as mine. Now you look much studier than before, so keep up the good work."

I see. Sorry, man, I took it the wrong way. But Jiang Shuyu, don't

waste your money. I've been eating the health foods Junjun has been cooking every day, consuming a whole bunch of evolution crystals, and even fighting a few death matches with aberrants. But all I've managed to get are these measly, flimsy muscles. If you want to train to be like Dàgē, it'd be quicker if you got struck by lightning and got sent to another world!

I mournfully looked down at my skinny body. There was indeed a little meat on my arms, and while you couldn't say that there were abs on my stomach, it was at least very toned. But all this was nothing when compared to the Dàgē next to me!

Fine, us mortals shouldn't compare ourselves to the godly Dàgē, I'll—I'll compare myself with Xiao Sha!

Junjun said that his waist might be narrower than mine, so next time, I'll go measure it myself. If he dares to be more buff than me, I'll ask Junjun to starve him until he's thinner than me!



I didn't know where I had heard it from, but someone had once said that all special abilities came from the same root—it was just a question of how you used them. The black fog that came every year actually carried a type of energy that unlocked a switch in human bodies, allowing people to access this energy.

But forget about the end of the ten years, even from the very beginning, Guan Weijun had lagged far behind the others. If she were in a race, she would only have run about three meters past the starting line. The highest tier aberrant she had ever faced was only a

third tier, and this only happened eight years into the apocalypse.

On the other hand, Jiang Shuyu was able to kill two tier one aberrants within the first three months of the apocalypse. There was a saying, there was no point in comparing because there would always be something or someone better. You'd forever be holding trash, and you'd forever be trash!

Then again, Jiang Shuyu had eaten far more crystals than Guan Weijun. I tried to console myself that my previous self wasn't entirely useless but just very stupid. There was no way she could have become strong if she kept on giving all her evolution crystals to her trash boyfriend.

Although I had sworn that I would become the Ice Emperor during this lifetime, that Ice Emperor was probably already leading his mercenary troop to conquer the world by now. The news just hadn't reached us yet simply because we were on wholly different continents ... *Um, or at least I don't think we're on the same continent?*

Although the continents' names were different, they could still roughly be mapped to each other. Meisia was probably Asia, and while I didn't remember which continent the Ice Emperor was on, I was absolutely certain that he wasn't here during the early days of the apocalypse. *As for the top elite in Asia, who was that again...? I forgot.*

Xia Zhengu had always told me off for not being able to remember the three human elites. But I couldn't have cared less at the time—remembering where there were supplies was far more important back then. That lazy ass hadn't even known where supermarkets were at

the beginning of the apocalypse. *Did he think that knowing the names of the three elites would help fill his belly?*

By the way, I'd originally thought that the Oceania here and the one there were one and the same, but I was wrong. The Oceania there corresponded to Glacia¹ here, which was also the place where Dàgē almost got trapped.

The Ice Emperor was far away on another continent, so that was that. In Asia... well, Meisia, there had in fact been one elite. If we could get them to join the mercenary troop, wouldn't we reign supreme in the apocalypse? But then I couldn't remember his name, only that his surname was very unique. *What is it?*

"Èrgē, what are you thinking about?"

I replied without thinking, "Thunder."

"You want to eat chocolate?"

I looked up and stared at Shujun in confusion. "Huh?"

Shujun gave me an innocent look as she said, "We don't have Black Thunder chocolate in the basement. Dàgē says that one is too sweet and he hates it, so I didn't get any back then. Is Godiva okay?"

There really is no comparing people! I nodded with grateful tears in my eyes. In the past, I couldn't afford to eat these chocolates, so I was going to make up for it now! In any case, I needed more calories to build up a muscular body.

Speaking of muscles, I beckoned to Xiao Sha, who was practicing his knife throws.

Xiao Sha walked over, his eyes filled with resignation as he said, "Is it my turn to train?"

"Hold up your arms."

He obediently did so. Although Dàgē said that my acting skills were quite terrible, they were still good enough for dealing with the mercenary troop. Right now, they listened to every word I said, so they really were treating me as the Boss Jr. of the mercenary troop... *That sounds kind of wrong. Anyway, beating up Dàgē twice has really yielded some benefits.*

I took out a measuring tape to measure Xiao Sha's waist.

He was one inch wider.

Silence.

From today onwards, I will eat Godiva as part of my meals! And Xiao Sha will only eat vegetables!

In the end, Shujun said that vegetables were even more precious than Godiva and forbade him from turning vegetarian. I had no choice but to give up on the idea with tears in my eyes and resigned myself to eating more Godiva instead.

At the dining table, I spoke seriously, "Dàgē, when you're out looking for supplies and you encounter someone with very strong lightning powers with a very unique surname, can you ask for their name? Get to know that person and leave them a way to contact us, then come back and tell me their name."

"Already done," Dàgē replied calmly.

I jolted and asked quickly, "Really? What's his name?"

"Jiang Shujun."

...Shujun has very strong lightning powers and a unique surname, "Jiang." Holy shit!

"The Thunder God is male." Such a pity. So close—but I couldn't bear to have my cute little sister change sex, so I tearfully gave up on the notion.

"Thunder God?" Everyone perked up with interest.

"You mean the chocolate?" Yunqian licked her lips, "Those are sweet *and* delicious."

"It's a person!" *Is food the only thing that's on their minds?!* I raged, "Ice Emperor, Thunder God, and Flame King—these are the top three human elites, so remember these names!"

Our mercenary troop had all three of their abilities—ice, lightning, and fire. But in my previous life, we didn't have a single person who stood

out. *What a failure!*

"Don't tell me..." Cain said solemnly, "that I'm actually—"

"No," I dashed cold water over him, "the Flame King isn't on this continent. The person in Meisia is the Thunder God."

Cain instantly deflated, while the others collectively looked toward Shujun. Ever since that training session, their respect for Shujun had grown in leaps and bounds by the day. They even had a revelation of "so just by doing housework, you can train to be so awesome," and so they all started scrambling to do the housework.

Ceng Yunqian focused on doing the laundry, Lily swept away every single speck of dust in the house, Xiao Sha was responsible for hanging the clothes and drying them while he was at it, Zheng Xing was tilling the fields to grow crops, and with Cain around, we didn't need to worry about fire whenever we ran out of gas.

The Jiang Dominion Troop was about to be renamed as the Jiang Housework Troop.

In contrast, it was the three deadweights who were the most leisurely, and watching the three freeloaders eating and drinking their fill was starting to tick me off. Su Ying and Chen Qianru weren't too bad, because they could keep Shujun company, and they could also contribute a little to doing the housework. But for that silent as a morgue Ding Jun—*hmp, I'm going to make him so busy, he'll wish he were dead!*

Lily stuttered in absolute astonishment, "D-don't tell me the Thunder God is Sh-Shujun?"

I became speechless. *Didn't anyone hear what I just said?* "The Thunder God is male."

Everyone breathed sighs of relief, pissing me off so much that I ground my teeth, wanting to scream, "Every one of you, out! We're gonna start training!" *Do they have any idea how much I wish that Shujun is the Thunder God? Then we would rule this apocalyptic world!*

"I want to check out Zhongguan City today," Dàgē suddenly interjected, "so I'll keep an eye out for this Thunder God of yours. But the likelihood of running into him is quite low."

I know it's unlikely, just saying. Still, Dàgē suddenly wants to go into the city? I thought about it for a moment. *No, it's not very unusual.* The police station was already on the outskirts of the city, so they had probably run out of things to scavenge in the neighborhood. We weren't short on supplies—we had long run out of space in the basement, but we were short on ammunition. Even the police station operation hadn't yielded much, so if they wanted to find more, they had to head into the city.

"Shuyu, stay here and watch over the house."

I blinked, and then said quickly, "Dàgē, I should be going with you." Dàgē shook his head in reply. "It's a long journey to the city, so we will need to stay the night there if we're to find something good. And if I'm going for more than a day, I can only trust you to watch the house."

I'll leave Xiao Sha here to guard with you."

...Dàgē, you keep putting Xiao Sha together with me at every opportunity you get. Are you sure you're not up to something?

I pondered over the facts. If Dàgē and I left, neither of us would be able to stop worrying about the house, so we had to leave one of us behind. But we couldn't let Dàgē stay at home—after all, the troop could only be led by Dàgē. I was just a stronger individual fighting unit but was no good at commanding.

"Why don't you leave Ceng Yunqian here? She can snipe, and that's not something I'm good at."

Guan Weijun had never been so lucky as to be able to find something as high-spec as a sniping rifle.

"Sure."

I glanced over the deadweight trio and said, "Dàgē, why don't you take Ding Jun along? He needs to work for his meals."

Ding Jun looked me in the eye, still refusing to speak a single word.

I admit to being a chauvinist—making life difficult only for Ding Jun but going easy on Su Ying and Chen Qianru. I just instinctively felt that girls should stay at home and shouldn't fight whenever possible. So even if Shujun's abilities had plenty of attack power, Dàgē and I still didn't want to let her go with the mercenary troop. She should be protected as much as possible.

It's really not a good thing, but I can't help it. I really can't bear to see Shujun...

"Shutian, Xiao Yu," Auntie suddenly spoke up, "I'll go too."

I blinked and blurted, "No way!"

Dàgē frowned.

"My ability is sensing all living creatures around me, so I can help Shutian and the others avoid danger. You should let me go, if you don't want Uncle and me to worry."

I'd almost forgotten Auntie's powers—they really would come in handy. I hesitated and looked at Dàgē.

Unexpectedly, Dàgē only pondered for a heartbeat before he nodded, "All right, Auntie, come with us. Also, Su Ying, you must come as well." Su Ying became flustered, and even turned to look at Shujun, but Shujun didn't back her up. As expected of my mèimei, she knew that Dàgē was right and listened to him.

Su Ying had no choice but to agree.

I understood the reason for taking her along—she had psychic powers, and she had spent a long time in the presence of a brainwight. If they encountered psyche-type aberrants like the brainwight, she would have better resistance against their powers and could wake up the others.

Dàgē stood up and addressed everyone, saying, "The operation will be conducted in Zhongguan City, and the duration will be three days. Prepare your things now, and we will set out in one hour."

With that, everyone gave a cheer and scattered. The good progress in their training made me feel a lot more comfortable about this extended trip. After all, Dàgē had been able to break out of the city at the beginning, whereas now he was just going to wander around the outskirts. And everyone's abilities had improved a little, so there shouldn't be any problems.

Yet after issuing the order, Dàgē didn't go to pack his things, because Shujun was doing it for him.

He turned to look at me. "Shuyu, is there anything you want me to bring back?"

I thought briefly before replying, "Godiva."

When Shujun came by with the luggage, she brought me another plate full of sweets, the majority of which were chocolates.

"Èrgē, don't worry. Back then, I took many boxes of chocolates!"

I remembered you had only gotten a few boxes of stuff—don't tell me that they only contained chicken soup, Chinese medicinal herbs, and chocolates? Come on, even the sanitary napkins were things that I got for you!

Shujun turned to Dàgē. "Dàgē, bring back a small fridge then. Èrgē loves eating sweets, so we can put the small fridge in his room, and I can stuff it full of chocolates."

I suddenly felt danger to my waistline in the horizons. *I only want to be a little fatter than Xiao Sha, nothing more. No, seriously.*

"We should also get another small electric generator, and the more gas and petrol, the better," I hastily added. Although I was pretty sure Dàgē knew to get these things, I couldn't help but nag at him—if I didn't remind him, I wouldn't feel at ease.

"Sure."

I hesitated, but still spoke up in the end, "Dàgē, don't bring back too many people. Just bring back those who don't look too sly or calculating."

Dàgē gave me a look and said slowly and deliberately, "Actually, I wasn't planning on bringing anyone back."

I never imagined that Dàgē would be even more ruthless than me. It was true that keeping the status quo and not accepting any newcomers was safer—after all, the more people you had, the messier it became. Even if Dàgē's mercenary troop could enforce order, once the newcomers hit a critical mass, they would always start fighting among each other, and there would even be those plotting their own schemes. By then, they would form their little cliques and circles.

But if we didn't take in people now, we would risk running short on

manpower in the future. So rather than looking for people in the future, it would be easier to raise a more loyal bunch if we took them now instead.

Judging from how things would develop, colonies were guaranteed to spring up. After all, humans were communal and social creatures—not to say there weren't lone wolves, but even lone wolves ultimately relied on colonies for survival. And for us with our own organized group, there was no way the colony leaders would let us develop and grow. If they didn't kick us out, we would be forcibly annexed into their group and split up from there.

I simply couldn't imagine Dàgē being subordinate to anyone or having to obey orders. I also wasn't willing to let the mercenary troop be dismantled.

"We need more people. In the future, we will establish our own colony." Dàgē stared at me. "You want to establish a base? Why?"

I blinked. *Why? Because if we don't build one ourselves, then we would have to live under other people's command. Dàgē is so mighty that it's hard to imagine anyone not being daunted or intimidated by him. And Xiǎomèi is so young, pretty, and cute that it's hard to imagine anyone not lusting after her. Even I myself have a face that attracts lots of trouble, so I have no idea how on earth we could possibly survive in other people's territories!*

"I just want everyone to live safely and peacefully together."

Shujun immediately jumped over and hugged me tightly. "We

definitely will!"

Dàgē gave a faint smile. "All right, then let's establish a base. I'll make the preparations, so don't worry yourself too much. Dàgē will take care of everything."

He reached out with both hands and ruffled Shujun's and my heads.
Just how much does Dàgē like rubbing people's heads?

"Shuyu, you're only eighteen, just three years older than Shujun. You're still a child, so you don't have to worry about so many things."

"This is the apocalypse, Dàgē." I rolled my eyes at him and said huffily, "Aberrants don't give a damn how old I am when they bite me."

"With Dàgē around, no aberrants will be able to bite you."

Al right, I admit this line does make me feel awesome. Even if I knew I'd never accept being protected by someone in this lifetime, the fact that someone was willing to protect me still made me very happy indeed.

"If you have nothing to do, go out and find love. You're already eighteen."

...Dàgē, I really haven't figured out which gender I like. Please, give me some time to think about this.

I shot back with an equally punchy question, "Dàgē, you're twenty-seven already. When will you give me a niece or nephew to play with?"

Dàgē thought a little, then said, "Yunqian had asked me before, whether or not I could have a child with her. If you want one, I'll tell her yes."

Dàgē! What happened to your morals? Did they get eaten by an aberrant?! How can you accept being a tool for making babies?!

"No!" Shujun exclaimed in anger, "Dàgē, you can only have children with your future wife. If you dare to have kids with anyone else, I'll throw those children away!"

Well said, Shujun! Throw them away!

Dàgē gave a low chuckle and spoke as he ruffled his sibling's heads, "All right, I won't, I won't. Throw them away as you like."

Shujun was still pouting, but she snuck me a secretive, meaningful glance. I returned with a look of "got it." Siblings' minds think alike indeed.

We have to keep a close eye on our Dàgē!

Footnotes

¹ **"Glacia":** Used to be translated as the Arctic. After receiving more information, we have now decided to translate this continent's name as Glacia.

Chapter 3: Red as Blood, Dazzling as Flowers

Today was the third day after Dàgē's departure. These past few days, I had left Yunqian's training to Shujun, wanting to get the ice spear to a somewhat usable state as soon as possible.

This new weapon had to last me a good three to five years, so I took it very seriously. Every layer of ice crystals was compressed into a very fine layer, and that meant that I had to expend even more effort. Thankfully, I was more powerful than before, so I was able to compress more layers each time. Judging from the progress, it would probably take me around a month—*oh wait, there's a spearhead as well this time, so that would add another ten days to the count.*

Dàgē had wanted to go to Zhongguan City while I stayed behind to mind the house, and since I needed to craft my spear and all, everything worked out just fine.

But what about afterwards? I can't keep watching the house every time, right? Even if I keep getting my share of crystals, I'll miss out on actual combat experience, which is a no go.

But we'll need someone to mind the house. What a headache...

"Èrgē, it's time for dinner!" Shujun poked her head in and looked curiously at the ice spear, giving an admiring sigh. "Your long spear is becoming prettier and prettier!"

Yes, no matter how fugly it was, it would still look presentable when wrapped in layers of compressed ice. And this time, I had made sure

to compress it extra well, so the clear ice had turned a little milky white, which was perfect for concealing the true nature of the spear—that of a broken knife tied to a broomstick handle.

I stood up and followed my sister, carrying the ice spear with me.
“Èrgē, why are you bringing it to dinner?”

I looked down at the spear, replying, “I kind of got used to carrying it around. And the cold feels pretty nice.”

It was now September, and the weather was still fairly hot. This was pretty similar to what had happened in my previous life. Global temperatures started fluctuating more dramatically. As time wore on, the temperature differences would only grow more and more extreme, to the point where the four seasons were so clearly delineated that even a visitor from another universe could tell which season it was the moment they stepped into this universe. Thankfully, the temperature differences would stabilize five years into the apocalypse; otherwise, it would get to the stage where even aberrants wouldn't be able to survive, much less humans.

In the days to come, spring would herald an explosion of life and all sorts of aberrants would start evolving like crazy, particularly the plants. During this period, it was best not to leave the city; that said, however, the bounty was rich if you did. Summers would be so hot that you could die from dehydration. No small number of people had died in fights over a mouthful of water. Autumn was a good season. You could survive just on the fruits you picked. As for winter, it was fairly obvious that it was the season with the greatest number of deaths each year.

"It's been pretty hot recently."

The two of us headed to the living room together. Shujun seemed to think of something, and she asked worriedly, "Èrgē, with your ice powers, does it mean you're afraid of the heat? Maybe I should switch on the air conditioning?"

The small electric generator wasn't quite enough to supply electricity to the whole house, so we never really switched on the air con in the house.

Seeing Shujun worrying about whether or not her èrgē would melt, I burst into laughter. "You've got it the wrong way around. I'm definitely the person who's least afraid of the heat. I'm already a walking freezer myself, and once I become stronger, I can act as the air conditioning unit in the house."

Shujun went "oh" with a look of realization, then she asked with interest, "Èrgē, are you afraid of the cold?"

I shook my head.

"That's so nice! Then, is Cain unafraid of the heat as well?"

"Yup, actually, once you eat more evolution crystals, you'll be increasingly immune to the heat and cold, because your body will grow stronger and adapt better to the environment."

Shujun nodded, comprehension dawning as she said, "No wonder. It's

been so hot recently, but it's still somewhat bearable. I used to be unable to eat or sleep because of the heat without the AC on."

Back in the living room, Uncle, Yunqian, and Chen Qianru had all gathered. The one deadweight left behind had enough self-awareness that she helped Shujun with cooking and housework these past few days, making her less of an eyesore. However, Shujun said that she should only help to cut meat and chop up vegetables. We really couldn't let her do any more than that.

When stir-frying meat, she threw in a whole tablespoon of salt as seasoning, and she even managed to burn half the dish, so Shujun ended up having to feed the meat to the chickens after washing it—yes, that was correct. Chickens that survived the apocalypse lay large, round eggs that were extremely tasty, but we only had two of them, so there weren't enough eggs to go around. *I hope Dàgē will be able to find more livestock in the city.*

"I wonder if Dàgē can find us some seeds to grow," Shujun remarked as she frowned at the table that was covered with plates of meat, with only some canned or frozen vegetables like corn and peas as an accompaniment. "I really miss eating fresh veggies."

I wanted to eat fresh vegetables too, but I didn't dare voice it out loud. In my previous life, hot food was already a luxury I didn't dare to dream of, especially during the first three months of the apocalypse. But now, I was so spoiled that I even wanted to eat fresh vegetables. "Èrgē, have an egg." Shujun smiled as she passed me a fried egg that was larger than my palm. "I purposely kept the yolk runny for you." I looked at the egg. The yolk and the egg whites were separate and

fried to perfection. Shujun's culinary skills were improving by the day.

Although things were going by so well that I was starting to feel a bit guilty, I hoped that these heavenly days would continue forever.

Yup, with Dàgē here, everything will be fine! I cut out a piece of the egg with my chopsticks and started eating it appreciatively.

Unexpectedly, just as I took a bite, a frenzied clucking came from outside. *No way, the chicken knows I'm eating its egg?*

Yunqian immediately stood up and said, "I'll go take a look."

I looked at the egg longingly. Only Uncle and I had eggs to eat, and having someone else do the work on top of that made me feel really uncomfortable, so I quickly stopped her. "I'll go. You're tired from keeping watch all day as well, so sit down and have some more food. Those chickens are probably just fighting each other again."

Yunqian didn't protest. She just gave a shrug and sat back down again. I pushed aside the chair, forgetting for a moment that the ice spear was leaning against it, and with a *smack!* it fell to the ground. I scooped it up casually and headed to the back garden.

The chickens were cooped up in a stainless steel cage that was meant for large dogs. The chickens were now double the size compared to before, and they wouldn't lose to a dog in strength. Together with those large, hard beaks, they'd be able to peck their way through wood any time, so they couldn't be kept in anything but a metal cage. But for some reason, these two chickens hated each other. The

slightest thing would set them off, and they'd squabble. Unfortunately, Dàgē couldn't find another cage as large as this one; otherwise, we'd just split up the two of them. *Sigh*. I'd forgotten to remind Dàgē to look for some cages as well. I hoped he would remember, because we were going to accumulate a lot of livestock in the future.

As expected, the two chickens were in a frenzy, jumping around, kicking at the cage and pecking at the lock. They were even crazier than usual.

I frowned. *The two chickens aren't having a go at each other. What's going on?*

I racked my brain trying to recall whether I had seen similar situations before. I remembered whenever we had found temporary shelter, I had insisted on raising livestock. The days of constantly being hungry and on the run had traumatized me, and I'd then become obsessed with stocking up on food.

I didn't know how many times I had to stop that idiot, Xia Zhengu, from immediately eating every single animal or aberrant he captured, especially things like chickens and ducks that could lay eggs. If he dared to eat them, I would eat him alive! Of course, this was before he became strong.

I seemed to remember that those animals would also start going crazy for no reason at all, especially when...

There's danger!

I jolted and instinctively spun to look around me. The surrounding residences were as quiet as ever, without a single sound to be heard. But the houses, the walls, and the trees blocked too much. I couldn't make out anything from where I was standing, so I immediately ran into the house and dashed up toward the attic and the roof-top balcony.

On the balcony, I looked around. There wasn't any movement to be seen in the neighborhood. Dàgē and the others had been extremely thorough in their clean up, and you couldn't even find so much as a dog on the streets.

Am I being too paranoid? Maybe the chickens are just being crazy and having a hell of a work out —wait, the sky in the distance seems...

I squinted. It was dark, with no polluting lights around. The stars were very pretty and all, but the lack of a light source also made it hard to see anything. I just felt like a part of the sky seemed to be especially dark, and it even seemed to be... moving?

I stared at it for a while, regretting a little that I hadn't made Lily stay back. She had good eyesight.

Wait, that's—

A flock of birds!

I started and immediately rushed from the balcony to the attic. I looked through the porthole, observing the direction the flock was taking.

If those were normal birds, they would still avoid coming into houses by force of habit. But if those were aberrant birds, then all bets were off.

The flock's trajectory across the sky wasn't looking good. If they stayed on track, they would definitely pass by this place.

I quickly headed downstairs. I had to tell Shujun and the others. We had to keep absolutely quiet. If it was a flock of aberrant birds, and they discovered that there was "food" here, then we would really turn into their dinner!

When I arrived at the living room, Shujun immediately called out to me, "Èrgē."

I immediately made a "hush" sign and quietly explained the situation about the birds' attacking and made everyone remain quiet. This wasn't difficult at all. After I motioned them to be silent, the four of them didn't say a word.

The company I had kept in my past life really couldn't hold a candle to them. Thinking back, whenever we had encountered aberrant attacks, all sorts of chaos had ensued. We had had screaming housewives, kids running around unattended, muscular guys who thought they could make a dash for it—you name it, we had it. It was almost impossible to control the situation back then.

I gave a simple explanation, and just as we were planning to quietly wait for the danger to pass, I suddenly heard the unexpected sounds

of clucking.

Shit, the chickens are still outside!

I immediately ran out to the back garden with Yunqian hot on my heels, and we yanked open the metal cage. The two chickens immediately pounced on us. Naturally, it was not to jump into our warm embrace, but to try to run away. Me and Yunqian each grabbed one, but the chickens had gone completely mad and struggled like crazy, refusing to let us bring them into the house.

Actually, the chickens' struggles didn't mean much to either of us; we were just worried that if we were too forceful, we would accidentally kill them. If they turned into aberrant chickens, then it would be even harder to raise them. Although aberrants were edible, there was no guarantee that they'd taste good. A lot of aberrants were even poisonous, so if we had the choice, we would rather eat plants and animals that hadn't mutated.

Holding onto the wildly kicking chickens, I looked up at the sky. The birds were already clearly visible, but due to the darkness, I could not make out their appearance.

"Shuyu," Ceng Yunqian whispered, "from this distance, there's something off about the size of those birds. They're too big. Their wingspan looks to be at least two meters long, and some might even be three meters."

When I heard the clucking coming from one hand, I immediately reached out with my other hand and wrung the chicken's neck. Then, I

also snapped the one in Yunqian's hands, and froze them over; otherwise, it'd be troublesome if they turned into aberrants. I passed the dead chickens to Yunqian and said softly, "Go back to the living room and arm yourself. Pass guns to Uncle and Shujun as well. I'll go watch from the attic."

As for Chen Qianru, I wasn't being biased against her. It was just that she'd never shot a gun before, and so was equally likely to accidentally shoot friend instead of foe when flustered. It was better if she just quietly stayed in the back and out of trouble.

Although Shujun's abilities were quite strong and Yunqian's weren't half bad either, judging from the size and the number of birds in that flock, they probably wouldn't have enough energy to last a fight against a flock. So they would still have to use guns.

Back in the attic, I picked up the military binoculars that had originally been left there. This was something Dàgē had bought, so obviously they were great. With them, even at night with only starlight, I could see the birds' appearances clear as day.

The birds were as crimson as blood.

Ceng Yunqian was right. Their wingspans were at least two meters long, but the leader's definitely looked to be over three meters. Actually, I wouldn't be surprised if it was over four meters long. And their bodies were not covered in feathers; instead, they had thin, membrane-like wings. Just going by the wings, they were more like bats than birds, but at the same time, their heads looked like birds. But neither bats nor birds were covered by a layer of scales.

Those birds spell BIG trouble... I rediscovered just how terrible the Jiang family's luck was. I kept revising the number upwards, a number preceded by a negative sign!

No wonder the Jiang family were so mighty. With this kind of luck, the bloodline would have long died out without super specs. *How else could the bloodline have continued until me, Jiang Shuyu?*

The flock flew closer and closer. My guess was that there was no point hoping that the leader would change the path by even a little. The Jiang family's bad luck was just unbelievable, but if all else went well, the birds wouldn't stay. The neighborhood had been cleaned out very thoroughly, so there was no reason it would attract the attention of the birds... *Wait, isn't it a problem if it's too empty as well?*

D-don't tell me the birds are that smart?!

Frigging hell, there's no guessing that with the Jiang family's luck!

I lifted the binoculars, watching the flock gradually approach the house. I focused especially on the leading bird. It was so big that it was a bit ridiculous. Judging from how he looked pretty similar to the other birds around him, they had probably mutated from the same species of birds. Which meant that the reason he was especially big was probably because he was of a higher tier than the others...

Tier one aberrants were fast becoming an everyday occurrence in the Jiang family! I'd better train myself harder; after all, it wouldn't be strange if I ran into a tier-two aberrant one day while innocently

walking to the supermarket to search for a packet of instant noodles.

A tier one aberrant leading the flock. My heart pounded especially hard. Suddenly, my oath to never run away sprang to mind, and I couldn't help but give a wry smile. *What a lie. As if things are ever that simple.* At least for the moment, I didn't even dare to make a squeak. I really was too much of a coward. We were both first tiers, and while he was out there, flying boldly in the skies, I was crouched here, hiding in the house. I didn't even dare breathe too loudly. They say that you can't compare yourself with others. Now, I can't even compare to a bird!

Was I too relaxed lately? So many aberrants had already evolved to tier one, so in actual fact, my advantage of being reincarnated wasn't putting me too far ahead of the aberrants. And I'd actually thought to just stay home while leisurely crafting my ice spear, and to spend more than a month to do so, to boot.

Not long ago, I had been out there fighting aberrants while crafting my ice spear. *Just what reason is there for me not to leave the house just because I don't have a weapon? If there are enemies like Dàgē who could melt my ice staff, then would it mean that I'd have to resign myself to being someone's meal if I lost my weapon?*

No, I'd be wasting the advantage of reincarnation if I continue the same way as I have. Even if Dàgē chains me up after this, I have to sneak out occasionally for some solo hunting. If I leave a note and disappear for five to ten days in Zhongguan City, I wondered how angry Dàgē would be?

I shivered.

The flock was close. With no time to even think or daydream about random things, I watched the lead bird intently with wide eyes. Then, a name flashed across my mind.

The carrion-bloom bird.

Red as blood and as dazzling as flowers, they were covered in scales and had excellent vision. They had a tendency to flock together, as well as some other unique characteristics that I'd forgotten.

Actually, I hadn't encountered very many types of aberrants. After all, I had been so weak that if I had made the slightest sound, I wouldn't manage to escape with my life. So there was simply no way I was hanging around to observe what the aberrants looked like. But there were rumors aplenty.

For some reason, in that small colony of ours, I got along fairly well with people. Aside from being disliked by whichever woman was currently in Xia Zhengu's favor, other people didn't have any bones to pick with me. If anything, they loved chatting with me, which I didn't mind in the slightest, since I had nothing much to do. Xia Zhengu never allowed his "girlfriend" to do any work because he found it utterly humiliating, so I ended up listening to many stories in my free time. And naturally, the majority of stories during the apocalyptic days would be all sorts of tales of how they had escaped from the jaws of aberrants.

The flock flew past the roof. I could hear flapping wings and the

propulsion of air as they occasionally flexed their wings while gliding. From the rhythm, they were going to fly right past us. I breathed a sigh of relief. *Thank god they didn't stop.*

Bang!

I froze. *Is that a gunshot? It sounds like it came from downstairs.* Before I even had time to worry about what was going on down there, I heard a change in the flapping of wings. It was no longer the soft beat of gliding motions, but a continuous series of frenzied flaps, the beating of wings to make an emergency stop.

Then, the red birds landed, covering the entire rooftop balcony. I held my breath, not making a single sound, praying fervently that they wouldn't make any more sounds downstairs. *But what's going on down there?*

Suppressing the anxiety in my heart, I quietly looked down through the porthole. Thankfully, there weren't any birds in the back garden. They had all landed either on the balcony or the roof.

Just go! There isn't enough meat to even fill your beaks!

On the balcony, a huge carrion-bloom bird was stretching out its head and continually peering in through the windows at the inside of the house. I could only keep myself pressed tightly against the wall to avoid being seen. But one bird pecked apart a glass window and stuck its head inside for a look. Its scaly head was right above where I was. *I'm done for.*

I gripped my ice spear, trying to swallow back my terror. What I had to do now, and the only thing I could do now, was to stab this bird right through its brain, then make a break for the outside like a madman. This was in the sliver of hope that these birds would all be led away by me, so they wouldn't notice Shujun and the others...

That bird suddenly yanked back its head, literally an instant before I was about to act.

I turned my head at an excruciatingly slow pace to look through the porthole. All the birds on the balcony were looking in the same direction. *That light... car lights! Dàgē and the others are back!*

There was a sudden screeching bird call and the flock of carrion-bloom birds all took to the air. Seeing that, I immediately dashed downstairs, using the railings as a slide and even kicking off against the wall, practically flying my way into the living room.

All four people were there, and not a single one of them was missing. Without any time to take in their expressions, I snatched the machine gun from Uncle's hands.

Ceng Yunqian said in embarrassment, "Shuyu, I'm sorry. I couldn't control the situation..."

I ignored her, kicked open the front door, and charged out. Then, I started firing like crazy at the sky.

Dàgē and the others were sitting in their car, and with the darkness of night, if such a large flock of birds rushed at them, it was possible that

even the car would get turned over. I had to warn them, and hinder the flock while I was at it.

Filling the sky, the carrion-bloom birds made a large turn and started circling in the air. They all stared at me, and with the gazes of so many aberrants boring into me, my heart started racing. Terror flooded my mind, alongside just the slightest hint of... excitement.

That leading bird was the same tier as me: tier one. "Depressing" wasn't enough to describe the situation just now when he was soaring high in the skies while I was hiding far below, but with so many birds under him, just having each bird spit a mouthful of spittle was enough to drown a person... No, in this lifetime, I would probably never die drowning. Although I wasn't a water-type ability user, I was still an ice user. So even if you threw me into an ocean, I could still conjure a small boat of ice.

In any case, he had his flock of birds and I had my dàgē. *Let's see who should be afraid now! Tonight, we're having an extra serving of bird, to make up for the passing of the two chickens.*

I ignored the red birds that had filled the skies, turning instead to stare directly at my rooftop. The tier one carrion-bloom bird was perched there, above the attic. It was almost as big as that small attic, making the attic look just like a toy on first glance.

The carrion-bloom bird was staring right at me. He had a pair of black irises, so large that you almost couldn't see the whites of his eyes, no different from any other bird. But because of his size, his eyes naturally became much bigger as well, and they sent chills running

down my spine.

But the gaze leveled at me was not one of a bird's. If not for his appearance, it felt exactly like being stared at by a person. He had his head held up arrogantly as he judged me, like he was assessing whether or not I was worthy of being his opponent.

I hefted the machine gun in my hand. This was an assault rifle, and if my guess was correct, it was a LA85A1. With a gun like this in the first year of the apocalypse, as long as you had bullets, survival wasn't an issue. But to fight that thing on the rooftop with firearms, I'd probably need a Barrett M95.

In my previous life, I'd survived the most dangerous place, the city, with just a broomstick handle, but in this life, I had to use a Barrett to survive in the suburbs. I really didn't know whether I should envy the Jiang family or not. *Don't tell me this is all about how "greater power brings greater responsibility," so every hero has to face an endless torrent of misfortune?*

The flapping of birds' wings from behind me grew louder and louder, but what followed instead was a string of gunshots. Dàgē and the others had reacted.

In that moment, the carrion-bloom bird lifted his head to give out a long cry. There was a ring of white around his neck. *That's right, this should be a female.* Back when I had first heard this story, that person had said that female birds would have patterns on their necks.

Behind me, the sound of the flock grew a bit more distant once again.

They must have gone to fight against Dàgē and the others, while my opponent was this white-necked carrion-bloom bird. She stared at me, the look in her eyes as clear as day. It was almost like she was declaring, *I am your opponent.*

This bird had real character, and that wasn't good in the slightest. From the looks of things, it seemed like the days when aberrants could speak weren't as far away as I'd first heard. Rather, it had probably taken some time for this information to disseminate to the general public.

"Xiao Yu!"

Ceng Yunqian, Shujun, and Uncle rushed out, each of them holding a gun. Only Chen Qianru was absent, probably because Ceng Yunqian felt that she would only get in the way and banned her from coming out.

I jabbed a thumb behind me, saying, "Go fight against the flock with Dàgē."

They had their backs to the white-necked carrion-bloom bird, so they hadn't noticed her existence. But I wasn't worried that she would launch a sneak attack on them. This bird had her pride, like she was a queen sitting on her throne, while that flock were the knights serving under her. It was likely that she would only act if she was challenged by another tier-one being like me.

Shujun hesitantly asked, "C-can I go too?"

"Yes, go."

In contrast, I didn't have any hesitations sending her out to fight. Judging from how even staying at home could attract such a disaster to descend from the heavens, the might of the Jiang family's bad luck couldn't be underestimated. Shujun needed to start getting some actual combat experience as soon as possible, so that she could protect herself some day if the unexpected truly happened.

This was also the perfect chance for her to start by fighting non-human aberrants. Although none of the aberrants really counted as human, as long as they had a human's appearance, the psychological pressure from having to kill them was that much greater.

I really didn't want Shujun to have to deal with the stress from killing people right from her very first fight, so bird-shaped aberrants could be said to be quite a good beginning. You could just treat them like you were killing chickens or ducks, and the parts that weren't charred black by electricity could even be eaten!

"Shuyu, what are you looking at—"

Just as Uncle was about to turn in bewilderment to have a look, I shouted, "Don't look, run!" sending him jumping into the air in fright. Fortunately, Uncle was very obedient, and he froze in mid-turn. Then, Shujun immediately grabbed at him and, together with Yunqian, the three of them hurriedly brushed past me.

"Èrgē, be careful. Don't get hurt," Shujun reminded me.

I raised an eyebrow. *How's it possible not to get hurt? My opponent is a tier one carrion-bloom bird.*

"I'll try."

Hearing the footsteps fade into the distance, I gripped my gun in my left hand and my ice spear in my right. This time, I didn't craft ice blades under my feet. I wasn't familiar enough with those moves to risk using them in such a critical fight. The slightest mistake was enough to make me kiss the world goodbye.

The white-necked carrion-bloom bird spread her wings and gave a long cry, then she dipped her body, with her tail feathers pointing to the sky, ready to rush downwards at any moment. And that was exactly what she did, without a moment of hesitation. She came rushing at me like a bird-shaped missile. If I was struck head-on by that, I would probably turn into a pile of delicious minced meat.

I immediately raised my gun and started firing wildly at her, but as expected, it wasn't much use. This bird had probably encountered more than one attack with guns, so she had evolved in the direction of becoming bullet-proof, resulting in the evolution of scales.

I tossed aside the gun and stayed stock-still where I was. The moment just before the bird's imminent impact, I leaped up, using my ice spear to push against the ground and propel me even higher. At that moment, below me turned into a sea of red feathers, or perhaps I should say, red scales. This carrion-bloom bird's aberration wasn't complete yet, so there were still feathers on her wings. She hadn't yet entirely changed to scales, but instead, she was covered half in

feathers and half in scales.

I felt a lot better. If this was how far a tier one carrion-bloom bird had evolved, then those tierless subordinate birds of hers were definitely vulnerable to bullets. Even if Dàgē and the others weren't able to use their abilities very well in a fight, it didn't matter all that much, as they just had to keep firing bullets like crazy.

My upward ascent slowed, and I immediately used my downward momentum to stab toward the bird's neck. Unfortunately, she was extremely alert, and instantly rolled to one side, making a big turn in mid-air. The tip of my spear only brushed past her neck, slicing off a few feathers. I had no way of knowing if she had gotten hurt from that blow.

As I landed, I conjured ten ice knives and fired them at her belly. Although only a blow to the head was lethal, creating multiple wounds had its uses, and animal-shaped aberrants typically were softer around their bellies as compared to other areas.

Even before I touched the ground, the knives pinged and panged off of her, littering the ground. As I watched the bird's movement, I silently counted the number of sounds my knives made. *Exactly ten of them. What a pity.*

The carrion-bloom bird gave a short squawk of anger. *No way, I got her with the blow to her neck?*

Although you could only truly kill an aberrant by smashing apart its head, if you severed its neck and left only the head, there was nothing

to fear, even if the head could spit lightning from its mouth. This bird had quite a scaly head, evidence that she had purposely strengthened this weak spot, so it was probably easier if I just snapped her neck instead. So I decided to focus my attacks on her neck.

The biggest problem now was that she was flying around mid-air. Only when she was swooping down to launch her attack did I have the chance to fight back. This gave me no choice but to use the strategy of countering against a person's attacks—no wait, a bird's attacks. I couldn't help but recall the Ice Emperor's battle at that moment. *When will I able to reach such a height of ice powers, to be able to create ice paths that span the skies, to the point where there's no difference whether I'm fighting on land or in the air?*

The carrion-bloom bird came in for another attack. From the short and harsh squawks, I could tell that the bird was furious, reminding me that aberrants now were not the same as the ones ten years into the apocalypse. They were newly "born" babies who weren't even six months old, and they were mainly driven by animal instinct. But tier one aberrants had started to develop consciousness so, like a child, they were mercurial and impatient in temperament.

I once again created ten ice knives, the quality worse than the previous ones. Taking the opportunity as the bird swept low, I flung them out in twos and threes. I'd originally thought that she'd change her trajectory slightly to avoid them, or perhaps knock them down with her wings. But after swooping in a few times, she seemed to have realized that these flying knives simply posed no threat to her. They couldn't even hurt a feather, much less a scale. So she stopped caring about those small ice knives and focused on attacking me.

After a few exchanges with the bird, we had both accumulated injuries. Her beak had sliced past my left arm, while I had hit her wing with the shaft of my ice spear. Neither posed much of an injury to either of us. While they weren't exactly small injuries, as long as they didn't hinder our movement, they didn't amount to much. I didn't even feel the pain with the adrenaline from the tense fight pumping in my system.

The bird facing off against me obviously didn't think much of the injury to her wing, either. If anything, it simply served to make her even angrier. Then again, that was understandable. As a tier one aberrant leading such a large flock of birds, there probably weren't many opponents who could make so much as a scratch on her.

The bird circling in mid-air suddenly let out a long cry to the distance, and I quickly spun to take a look. The battle behind me was pretty heated, but the mercenary troop, who had ample ammunition, quite evidently had the upper hand. Unlike the one I was fighting, the other carrion-bloom birds weren't unafraid of bullets. With the wild bursts of machine-gun fire blasting into the air, the flock didn't even dare to fly too low. The corpses littering the ground warned them all too clearly of the fate that awaited them if they drew too close.

However, Dàgē and the others could do nothing against the flock that was flying too high above them. Thankfully, this white-necked carrion bloom bird's long cry broke the stalemate. This impatient baby no older than a few months had probably ordered them to attack. Once again, the flock dropped from a height to rush at them, only to be peppered with shots and come crashing to the ground one by one. Seeing that, the white-necked carrion-bloom bird became outraged.

She spread her wings, evidently wanting to switch fights and rush over to deal with Dàgē and the others. I immediately reacted with another high jump, firing out a dozen-odd ice knives in mid-air. She didn't care in the slightest, until one stabbed right into her neck. She gave a screech of pain and immediately swerved back to face me.

What stabbed her was not an ice knife that I had conjured randomly out of the air but my ice dagger. Those useless ice knives just now were merely camouflage to make her lose vigilance against them, so that she wouldn't be on her guard when I used the ice dagger as a throwing knife.

She returned to the attic and perched there, flapping her wings frantically and occasionally giving a screech of pain. But the ice dagger wasn't something that could be tossed aside that easily. Although ice powers had a disadvantage in that they froze the wounds closed, for the same reason, the ice dagger was frozen in the wound and couldn't be pulled out easily.

For birds that had no opposable thumbs, the only way they could get rid of the ice dagger would be to beat it off with their wings, which would only exacerbate the wound. It wouldn't be strange if a chunk of meat was torn off along with the dagger. But the wound was on her neck, so the carrion-bloom bird couldn't use too much force, or else she could possibly rip apart her own throat, which would be a far worse injury.

While she was doing that, I rushed up toward the attic. I leaped up to the second floor balcony, then I ran up the wall, creating a thin ice shelf with every step I took. The moment I kicked off a step, it would shatter, but it provided enough time for me to propel myself upwards

to the next step.

As long as there was somewhere I could step on, no high wall posed an obstacle to me.

The moment I arrived at the attic, the white-necked carrion-bloom bird immediately wanted to take to the air when it spotted me. But I immediately fired out a dozen-odd ice knives, and, not daring to be careless anymore, she was forced to land back on the balcony to dodge the knives. Seizing the opportunity, I raised my staff and charged at her, then swung it toward her neck. Although I missed, the next horizontal sweep struck her body.

In furious anguish, she twisted her head and bit at the shaft of my ice spear. She didn't let go, even when I shot out more ice knives at her that she had no way of dodging. She just let the knives hit her body. However, it was such a pity I didn't have a second ice dagger, otherwise... *No, I still have the ice shard!*

Just when I was about to take the ice shard from my chest pocket, the white-necked carrion-bloom bird started beating her wings. More importantly, she was still biting onto the shaft of my ice spear, refusing to let go. My heart leapt into my throat. I was dead meat if she took me up into the air.

I immediately pulled hard, trying to yank my ice spear free, but unexpectedly, the bird fought back. She bit hard, not letting go, while I simply couldn't release my grip. If she snatched away the ice spear, she would be able to fling it far, far away with only a few flaps of her wings. If that happened, then our only hope was that Dàgē had found

a Barrett.

In desperation, I had no choice but to freeze myself, freezing my hands to the ice spear and my feet to the balcony. And thus began the bizarre tug-of-war with a bird.

She frantically beat her wings, occasionally striking at my body, causing spasms of fiery pain to flare up all over. When the bird discovered that she had injured me, she became so excited that you'd think she'd won the lottery or something, and she kept sweeping her wings at me non-stop. The scales on those wings were as sharp as knives, and if not for the fact that I had created a layer of ice over my skin to block them, I'd have turned into sliced meat, so thin that I'd be perfect for hot pot.

But even if I could block the sharp scales, this didn't soften the impact in the slightest, and each blow raining down on me made my entire body ache like crazy. *Cough*, blood was even starting to trickle from my mouth.

Damned bird! I channeled my ice powers along the length of the ice spear right to the bird's beak. At first, she didn't seem to mind, but as the ice power grew stronger, she became so cold that she gave up on attacking me and immediately released my ice spear. Shivering, she flung her head from one side to the other wildly. Taking advantage of the moment when she was so cold that she had started to become dizzy, I immediately struck at her head with the shaft of my ice spear, sending the entire bird crashing onto the balcony.

Losing all rationality in her rage, she no longer cared about her

advantage of flight and started running at me, her legs pumping like pistons. Those legs of hers weren't the thin, frail legs of birds, but thick and strong instead. If I got kicked, I'd probably cough up my liver.

I wanted to dodge, but one wing of hers was enough to cover the entire balcony, so there was almost nowhere to run. I'd have to leave the balcony to evade her attack, but I couldn't do that, either. I had finally managed to make the bird furious enough to forget about flight, so I had to keep her from remembering. I had to finish her off, *now!*

I once again stole a glance at the battle going on below. Dàgē and the others already had control over the battle, and at least half of the birds that had been circling in the sky were now lying on the ground. *Good, I no longer need to keep anything in reserve. As long as I can deal with this bird in front of me, Dàgē can handle the rest.*

I tightened my grip on the ice spear, and ice energy rushed out in an unending torrent until it coated the entire ice spear. The ice spear started emitting a chill from tip to tip, and if anyone aside from me dared to hold it, half of their body would freeze over on contact, unless they had equal or greater power than I did.

The white-necked carrion-bloom bird glared pure hatred at the ice spear, but she didn't seem all that scared. Given that we were both tier one, she wouldn't get frozen over by my ice powers, but I had confidence that it would at least affect her movement.

I jabbed out with the ice spear. This was more than just the outward movement of the spear. The thrust also carried a large amount of

freezing energy so that the spear left a trail of frost wherever it passed. Even the carrion-bloom bird, a tier one like me, frosted over when struck. She shivered and countless bits of ice showered from her body, many of her movements hindered by the cold, making her unable to land a direct hit on me.

But it only affected "many" and not "all" of her actions, so I was still struck by a kick and two blows from her wings. Two attacks in particular were especially bad. The wing that caught my chest made me spit blood and my left calf was kicked hard. Fortunately, I had managed to twist in time to deflect some of the force, so the kick didn't land squarely on my leg. Otherwise, bone would be sticking out of my leg right now. Even so, these injuries impaired my movements dramatically.

Fortunately, the bird's injuries were even worse than mine. The ice spear had hit her solidly five times, and the blow to her right wing had even ripped apart her wing's tendons. Ever since that injury, she had stopped using her right wing when attacking me, and she couldn't take to the air anymore. She probably couldn't even fly properly now.

The whole balcony and the small attic had been completely devastated by our fight. The railings were long gone, and even the floor was cracking and falling apart, so I was fast running out of sure footing. But the bird was in an even sorrier state than me. Given her huge body mass and the unstable balcony that was on the verge of collapse, any step she took would cause the balcony to shudder violently.

She wanted to leave, but the injury to her wing made flying difficult. I once again took advantage of that and refused to let her take to the

sky. In desperation and rage, she once again rushed at me, completely forgetting the lessons learned from the past. I'd used her momentum against her quite a few times already to succeed in stabbing my long spear through her scales.

I thrust the long spear at her, but to my dismay, the spearhead snapped off! My pupils shrank in shock. Shit, this long spear wasn't sturdy enough, but I didn't have much in the way of choice. Even without the spearhead, the jagged top of the staff should still be able to hurt her.

Enraged, the bird completely disregarded that the long spear had stabbed into her flesh, and she became even crazier. Another portion of my broken spear snapped off. As expected, the ice became much more fragile the moment there was a crack.

I gritted my teeth, ignoring the crack, and jammed in the remaining length of the spear into her. By now, the bird and I were close enough that she could just open her beak and bite at me. And she did just that.

I immediately jerked my head to one side, and at the same time, kicked hard at the end of the spear jutting out of her. The spear went in even deeper, but I lost my balance as a result, and her beak slammed hard against my chest. This blow was so heavy that the wind was knocked out of me. Everything started to go dark, and if not for the fact that I could hear the impact of the beak against the shard of ice protecting my heart, I'd have thought I was dead.

The long spear had gone right into the bird's chest, with only half of it still exposed outside, but still the bird continued attacking me. An

aberrant's tenacity to life couldn't be underestimated at all. Not daring to kick the spear in any further, I could only attack the bird's head while dodging her attacks, wringing out every last drop of ice energy to use against her. But the bird seemed to have made up her mind in her fury, and charged at me like she was determined to drag me to hell, even if it meant dying herself.

As I was forced back to the edge of the balcony, I propped my feet against the stumps of the railings. Both of us were preparing for the final showdown in this fight between caged beasts, and only one of us was going to make it out of this alive!

The white-necked carrion-bloom bird gave a sorrowful cry to the sky, then ducked down its head to peck at me, but I had grabbed onto her lower beak, channeling my ice powers with all my might. Even if I wasn't as physically strong as the bird, I made up for it with the help of the freezing cold!

The bird's beak drew closer and closer, until its tip touched my forehead. With the sound of shattering ice, pain stabbed at my forehead. This was once again another tug-of-war, a war where we were wagering our lives. Either she pecked through my skull, or I turned her brains into frozen tofu...!

Suddenly, flapping wings sounded all around me. *Shit, this darned bird's sorrowful cry was a cry for help!*

I was trapped between a rock and a hard place, and the momentary lapse of concentration triggered a wave of pain to my forehead. I hastily focused my mind and ignored everything else. The bird before

me was my true enemy, and once I had dealt with her, none of the other birds really posed any threat to me...

I could see my own reflection in her huge pupils, my face screwed up like a devil's and not a trace of any of Jiang Shuyu's handsomeness to be seen.

In the apocalypse, the only path for survival was to turn yourself into a devil.

"I didn't reincarnate to die at the wings of a bird!"

Holding nothing back, I forced out all my ice energy in one explosive blast. What followed was an intense headache. For a moment, I couldn't tell if this was the pain from expending all of my power or the pain from my skull bursting open...

"Èrgē, watch out—!"

I was a little disorientated, then there was a sudden explosion of light, a very familiar light, accompanied by an equally familiar crackling. I relaxed and dropped onto my backside, then looked up to gaze at my first true enemy in this life. She had already turned into a bird-shaped ice sculpture.

I couldn't help but laugh, and delight welled up in my heart.
Crick crackle crackle.

"..." The person being squashed by a bird expressed his extreme discontent, especially since this bird had a wingspan of two meters and,

furthermore, smelled extremely burnt.

"Gē!"

Shujun rushed over and kicked away the charred bird corpse in a very un-ladylike manner. Then, she helped me up, and as she looked over my wounds, her expression turned both frustrated and furious. If not for where we were and my current condition, I was positive that she would start beating her èrgē while crying.

"I told you not to get hurt, so why did you get so many injuries?"

I could only laugh dryly. *How's it possible not to get injured? I'm lucky to be alive.*

"How'd you come so quickly?"

I looked away evasively and changed the subject, hoping to divert Shujun's attention to something else.

After all, when the white-necked carrion-bloom bird had called over the flock, I hadn't been able to afford to focus on anything except for her. My only hope was that Dàgē and the others would help shoot them down, but I had never imagined that the first person to arrive would be Shujun. With one blast of lightning, she had turned a bunch of birds into charcoal, so charred that they had become inedible. Shujun carefully helped me up into a sitting position and said unhappily, "Dàgē told me to keep an eye on you. He said that you'd definitely do something crazy, and that you would only restrain yourself if I was next to you."

Dàgē really is a big brother who knows what makes his didi tick. I didn't dare give a response to Shujun's words.

Shujun stared at my numerous wounds and didn't dare move me too much. After some hesitation, she still ended up speaking. "Èrgē, I'll help you off this place. It looks dangerous, like it'll collapse at any moment."

I nodded. Although every part of me was aching, the balcony was already swaying, and if I really did drop from here, it would hurt even more. I stood up, glancing at the corpse of the white-necked carrion-bloom bird uneasily.

"Junjun, I can manage going down myself. Call Dàgē over and get this bird's crystal out."

Although it was thoroughly frozen, it was hard to say whether or not the bird could revive if we defrosted it. But I'd been too traumatized by how terrible the Jiang family's luck was, so I wanted to deal with the problem as soon as possible and not leave anything to chance.

Shujun looked very worried, so I quickly took a few steps and ended up aching so much that I almost grimaced. Without any life-threatening danger to distract me, I discovered that every part of me was in agony.

I forced a smile, and only then did Shujun reluctantly say, "Fine, I'll call Dàgē over."

She turned, and just when I was about to follow, my chest tightened. I instinctively looked up at the sky.

A black shadow was rushing at us.

With no time to worry about the pain in my body, I rushed forward to push Shujun to one side, then I felt a powerful force slam into me. Splintering sounds came from my chest, and I sprawled onto the floor. The blow was so strong that it knocked out all the air from my lungs, and I couldn't breathe even with my mouth open. I felt like I was suffocating. *Just how bad are the wounds to my chest...*

As I slipped into unconsciousness, another memory of the story I had heard before came to mind in the most untimely manner.

Ma'am, y'know, this carrion-bloom bird isn't something you want to mess with. Even if you win in a fight against it, don't engage unless you have to. Those birds come in pairs with their mates, so if there's one, there's bound to be another around. And they will definitely be of the same tier.

"Èrgē! No—!"

I heard the faint shriek from Shujun, but it seemed to fade into the distance. *Am I going to pass out again?*

No, I can't. If I pass out now, then I'm as good as dead. I can't faint, I can't—

Chapter 4: The Jin Family

Bang!

My eyes flew open and I sucked in a deep, sharp breath. The air surging into my lungs triggered a coughing fit, and I started coughing like I was hacking up my lungs. It was only when I finally caught my breath that I had the energy to look around to figure out what had happened.

Every part of me was in absolute agony, proof that I wasn't dead yet. However, the darkness threatening to swallow my vision was a sign that I was injured very, very seriously. The pain had been bad enough before I had passed out, but the dial was now cranked up a few more notches. My chest had even lost all sensation.

I blinked quickly, clearing the blood that had trickled into my eye. It didn't help much. I was still looking at a sea of red, but I could just about make out my surroundings.

The first things that came into sight were high-rise buildings. I was surrounded by abandoned cars, and the majority of shops lining either side of the road had broken windows. Garbage littered the road. The city was a picture of desolation.

This is the city? A chill crept into my heart as I realized that I was lying by the roadside, drenched in blood. If I just lay out in the open, a tasty tier one morsel in this city where aberrants roamed freely, wasn't I just asking to be eaten? *Move!*

Rolling over took all the energy I could muster. The moment my chest hit the pavement, agony ripped through me, almost sending me back to unconsciousness. Something didn't feel right. Then, the memory of being crushed by the bird and the sound of something shattering rushed back to me. I touched my chest. The ice shard had been smashed to smithereens, leaving behind fragmented bits stuck to my skin. When I also remembered that my new ice spear had snapped, I wanted to cry. *Why is making a weapon so hard?*

But right now, survival was my top priority. *Where's that bird?* I looked around. There were a few crimson feathers and scales on the ground, but luckily for me, there was no sign of the bird.

No, this isn't lucky. In my current condition, I'd probably die even at the claws of normal aberrants, so the presence or absence of the bird hardly makes a difference...

"Who's there?!"

The voice sent a shock of adrenaline rushing through me. I looked up to see a woman walking out from behind a car, her gaze on me full of astonishment. She had a gun in one hand and the other... was on fire. She was way cooler than Cain.

We had Lily, Yunqian, Shujun and now, a few months into the apocalypse, a woman so hot that she literally caught fire. *Don't tell me that all the people in this world are so powerful? What happened to the tragic fates of women in the apocalypse?*

A million thoughts flashed to my mind that boiled down to one word:

"Help."

The woman watched me in silence, showing no reaction whatsoever.

"P-please, help me..." I begged in the most pitiful way possible, thinking back to the various poses and expressions I had made in front of the mirror and trying to adopt the most handsome look that would best garner people's sympathy. I could only hope that my face wasn't too hopelessly disfigured, and that the waves of pain running through my body weren't causing my face to twitch in time.

The woman lowered her gun. As she strode over, the flame in her other hand extinguished as well.

I breathed a sigh of relief. Although I didn't know what kind of person she was, I had to get myself out of my current situation where I could be eaten by an aberrant at any moment.

"Where are you hurt?" The woman knelt down.

"Everywhere." The moment I said that, she frowned, and I hastily added, "The worst is my chest. The rest isn't too bad."

Just that I couldn't move my left leg, and my right leg was so leaden that I almost couldn't lift it. Both my hands hurt so much that I felt like they had been flayed open by the bird's scales. And let's not forget the periodic stabbing pain in my back. Frankly, it was easier to say where it *didn't* hurt—probably just my hair.

The woman frowned as she said, "Don't tell me you're the guy that the

bird was holding onto?"

"...Yes, the red bird." To dispel her suspicions, I added a little detail.

So I've been carried into the city by the carrion-bloom bird that made his late appearance. T-this should be Zhongguan City, right? Don't tell me he took me even farther away?

When she heard my words, she sighed in admiration. "You sure cheated death! You aren't dead even though you got caught by that bird and dropped from the sky."

Believe me, Jiang Shuyu cheats death even more than you think. If it were Guan Weijun in my place, all my encounters in this life would have killed her at least thirty times over!

"Feng-jiě, what're you doing over there?"

The woman turned around and called out, "The person the bird was holding onto fell here, and he's still alive."

"Oh?"

There's someone else? I turned to look, but the abandoned cars around me blocked most of my line of sight, not to mention that the numbness in my chest was starting to fade. The pain ballooned, growing more and more agonizing until it became difficult to even breathe.

"Hey, you okay?" asked the woman as she looked back at me, her

voice tinged with a hint of worry.

"Y-yeah." Her question yanked my slipping consciousness back, and I struggled to stay awake. If I fainted now, I'd probably get left here. *I can't afford to faint!*

"As if. Your face is white as paper."

A few silhouettes came over, but I could no longer make out their features. To be honest, I hadn't paid much attention to the woman's looks either; my body ached so much that I couldn't concentrate at all. Suddenly, someone lifted me up in an embrace. The huge action made the pain in my chest explode, and I couldn't help but keen in pain.

"Hey, don't pass out! Stick with us!"

"With injuries like this, this guy's a goner for sure. You really want to take him back?"

"Shut your trap!" the woman growled.

When I heard that, I finally relaxed. *This woman definitely won't abandon me to my fate.*

That was why I kept saying that it was good to be born with good looks. Thanks to Jiang Shuyu's awesome looks, I could happily pass out.

Xiao Yu.

"Mm?"

There was a sudden change in scenery. I was in some kind of... backyard? I wanted to crane my head to look around, but my body refused to listen, moving toward some destination under its own volition. I panicked, but just as I was about to struggle, the sight of a certain person put my mind completely at ease.

It was Dàgē, except he looked to be around twenty.

I was dreaming about Jiang Shuyu's past again, so I was probably unconscious.

Dàgē beamed happily at me. Although he looked young, he had grown quite tall, and he purposely crouched down to speak to me. "Xiao Yu, I'm thinking of setting up a mercenary troop. What do you think?"

The Dàgē before me might have been even younger than I'd thought. He didn't possess the same gravity, and the moment he spoke about setting up a mercenary troop, his eyes sparkled with excitement. This was weirding me out a little, but at the same time, this was quite novel. Then, "I" spoke up in an angry, boyish voice.

"No!"

Dàgē looked like he had had cold water dumped on him, and he said with a frown, "Why? Do you think I can't do it?"

I suddenly started bouncing around crazily, and my pubescent voice forcefully roared like a lion cub's, "Last time, you said that you were

going to join the mercenaries. And then what happened? In the past three years, have you even spent three months at home? Once you set up a mercenary troop, will you even remember that you have a dīdi and mèimei? Forget about me, *I* don't care about you, but Junjun will miss you!"

Dàgē explained, a guilty look on his face, "The missions aren't short, you know. I've just started my career, so I need to go on more missions and accumulate more experience."

I waved my hand dismissively and exclaimed, "Dàgē, you joined the mercenaries the moment you graduated from high school. Now that we don't have any more money problems at home, you should go to university!"

Dàgē replied in a troubled tone of voice, "I'm not really interested in studying. It's enough if you do the studying."

"Knowledge is power! Gē, if you want to set up a mercenary troop, that's fine by me. But first, get through university!"

He said helplessly, "I need to do mercenary work, so where can I find time to study?"

I nodded, knowing that there was no way that he would abandon his budding mercenary career to go to university. So I compromised, "You can study at the National Open University. You only have to attend classes every few months. I've already researched it for you."

Dàgē finally started to frown and made a rare expression of discontent

to his dìdi. "Xiao Yu, this is my life. I can make my own decisions about what I want to do."

I ignored him and whipped out an application form. "The United Command and Staff College. I managed to sign you up to some intermediary Command and Staff courses through Dad's friends. If you score well, I'll think of something. We should be able to get you promoted into the advanced courses."

I thought hard, the long list of Dad's friends and contacts flashing through my mind. Then, I went through Mom's friends and contacts as well and concluded that there weren't any issues in that respect. So the only question was whether Dàgē's scores were good enough. After all, I couldn't turn a zero into one hundred through back doors. Mom and Dad had some really good friends, so it wouldn't be hard to get him a score of a hundred if we really needed to. But if some other people purposely wanted to make life hard for us, we'd run into a lot of problems, so I couldn't do that.

Dàgē gripped the application information, glaring at me.

I declared triumphantly, "If you want to set up a mercenary troop, you'll need to command it, right? If you want to lead a mercenary troop, it's not enough to just rely on individual combat ability!"

Dàgē continued scowling at me, and managed through ground teeth, "How old are you?"

"Nine years your junior," I replied in a matter-of-fact voice.

"I seem to be twenty this year."

I nodded gravely, saying, "So if you don't study now, you'll never make it in time."

"Make it in time for what?"

I tilted my head to one side, unable to reply to that, so I ended up saying, "You can make a lot of useful connections at the Command and Staff College. The earlier you meet them, the earlier they'll come in handy."

"You're almost scary in how bright you are," Dàgē said, clutching his head. "Mom had hoped that you'd be more like an innocent, carefree child."

I rolled my eyes at him. "If I was innocent and carefree, do you think you'd have been able to run around the world as a mercenary three years ago, Dàgē? Don't be greedy and wish for the world, too."

"Fair enough." Dàgē gave a wry laugh and said helplessly, "All right, if it's this kind of college, then I'll go. But this way, I'll spend even less time at home. Is that fine with you?"

I nodded. We didn't have a choice. He had Jiang blood running through his veins, which meant he was always on the hunt for danger. He took to mercenary work like a fish to water, and if not for me and Shujun, he'd probably never come back home.

I'd known for some time that he'd want his own mercenary troop; otherwise, I wouldn't have picked this subject for him to study. The

more powerful Dàgē and his troop became, the less likelihood of any incidents happening.

I had this nagging feeling that something was going to happen, some big trouble. I frowned. Ever since I was little, I'd never quite understood why I became frightened whenever I thought about the future.

Dàgē sighed. "Then, help me take care of Shujun."

"Like you need to tell me! Junjun's much more important than you. I've already picked which middle and high school she will attend. As for university, I'll have to wait to see what her interests are before deciding where she should go."

"Haha!" Dàgē burst into a bout of laughter, then shook his head helplessly. "Shuyu, honestly. You don't have to worry about everything, you know?"

"If you just stayed at home, went to a normal university and became a normal office drone who worked from nine to five, I wouldn't have to worry as much."

"...Then please, worry more."

I sighed and said, "Fine, it's not like I have a choice. You're my dàgē, after all!"

"Like hell I'm your dàgē."

I jolted.

"Are you actually awake or are you sleep talking?"

I slowly turned my head to the speaker. She was sitting next to the bed and leaning over to look down at me. But I couldn't quite make out her face because... *Miss, your boobs are in the way!*

She was wearing a sleeveless leather vest and had a belt made out of the same leather wrapped around her waist, complete with gun holsters. She looked to be a very awe-inspiring woman, and in her current get-up, she could star in an action film. *A kick-ass heroine with huge boobs is just perfect!*

Wait a sec, this isn't a movie, right? It's not that farfetched for me to have died again and traveled to another world, or even to a world inside a movie, going by my crazy experiences so far. But please, no! I don't want to leave Dàgē and Shujun!

I tried to get up, wanting to check whether or not I was still Jiang Shuyu.

"Don't move, you're injured real bad," the woman said with a frown. "If we didn't have medical facilities in this house and a family doc who can do surgeries, you'd be dead."

How can you possibly have such good medical facilities, to the point where your family doctor can perform surgeries? Just who are you?

"Is this Zhongguan City?" I prayed hard. I had to be in my original

world. No matter how good a new world could be, it still wouldn't beat Dàgē and Shujun!

Thankfully, the woman gave an affirmative "mm." I breathed a huge sigh of relief and immediately lay back in bed, because my chest was on fire and I didn't have any more energy to prop myself up.

The woman snapped angrily, "You've broken eight ribs, and even the ones that aren't broken have cracks. And you still wanna move around recklessly? You have a death wish? If you wanna die, just let me know. I'll send you off with a bullet."

I froze, not daring to move an inch.

The woman sat back down on the edge of the bed, and now I could finally see her face free from the "obstacles."

She had long hair, tied back into an extremely neat, high ponytail. The first things that leaped out from her face were her thick, straight eyebrows, making her look handsome, and below her eyes were a long nose and thin, red lips. *What a handsome woman!*

Strange as it was to describe a woman as handsome, no other word was more appropriate. She was both handsome and cool, and if you went by just her face, people would believe it even if you said she was a man with slightly more refined and elegant features! But when coupled with her huge breasts, there was no way she could be a man. That chest of hers was even bigger than Lily's. *Is it size G or an even bigger cup?*

The woman whacked my head hard, growling, "What're you staring at my chest for? You asking to get shot?"

Ow, ow! My head was going to explode. This woman had quite the arm strength. My eyes were filling with tears. I hadn't meant to stare. But they were so in my face, and for some reason, my eyes kept drifting there. This had to be Jiang Shuyu's fault. *He's a real eighteen year-old guy!*

"They're just two lumps of flesh. What's so special?" the woman grumbled a little, but at least she stopped trying to bust my brains and asked in a relatively friendly manner, "So, what's your name?"

"Jiang..." I stopped, then changed what I was going to say, "Call me Xiao Yu. Everyone calls me that."

Previously, that invading mercenary troop only had to hear the surname "Jiang" to guess that I was Jiang Shutian's dìdi, and they even used me as a hostage. Now that I was injured so badly, I had to be extra careful. I couldn't let anyone bring harm to Dàgē and the others.

"I'm Jin Feng," the woman said simply, then looked me up and down and nodded. "Xiao Yu suits you quite well. You look just like a guy who's as soft as a 'feather.'"

"...It's the Yu from 'universe.'"¹

Jin Feng gave a careless nod and just stared at me. I didn't bother asking her what she was staring at, either—*come on, she's looking at*

Jiang Shuyu's face. Does that even need to be asked?

With her two eyes boring into me unrelentingly, I thanked her while feeling a little awkward, "Um, thanks for saving me."

Jin Feng tilted her head as she continued staring at me, then smiled and remarked, "Thank your face."

Done that already.

"With your looks, why haven't you become a celebrity?" She paused, then asked suspiciously, "You haven't gone down that path yet, right? I don't really know the small-time celebrities."

"No, I just got into university. I never imagined the world would become like this."

I tried my best to look like I was depressed and close to tears. I tried to imagine how an eighteen year-old young man would behave in the face of an apocalypse but drew a blank. Young men from ten years later were hardly comparable, and I hadn't seen any normal young men since my reincarnation. Yes, there was a Lu Renjie, but too bad, he wasn't normal either.

Jin Feng ruffled my hair, reminding me of Dàgē. They had to be out of their minds with worry about me. I wondered how far this place was from home. Carrion-bloom birds flew very quickly, so Dàgē and the others wouldn't have been able to keep up. They were probably frantically looking everywhere for me, but the way things were, I couldn't even get out of bed and had no way of recovering my combat

power quickly. Not to mention this was Zhongguan City, the most dangerous area, the urban district...

A strange feeling struck me, and I looked around hurriedly. This room was massive, even bigger than ours, but the decor was extremely simple. The color scheme was predominantly black and white, the style quite similar to Dàgē's room. More importantly, it didn't have the ragged look that a room in the apocalypse should have—it was just an extremely simple, spacious room.

"Where is this?" I was dazed. *Just who on earth is this rescuer of mine?*

"My room," Jin Feng replied simply.

I was a little surprised. *This room is like my dàgē's, but it's actually yours? All right, you're so handsome and cool that it actually isn't that strange for this room to be yours.*

"And what about more generally?"

"The office building my family owns."

"..." I could only ask with additional "precision" and "exactness,"
"Where in Zhongguan City are we?"

"North Avenue district."

I frowned. *North Avenue district? Shit, it doesn't ring any bells.* Before, I hadn't planned on venturing that far, so I'd only studied the maps

around our home area and hadn't started looking through the roads in Zhongguan City.

I looked at Jin Feng, to see her gazing at me with a relishing look in her eyes. I started, and quickly spoke in a fearful tone of voice, "Is there a map I can look at? I want to see how far the bird carried me." Jin Feng didn't seem to mind as she nodded.

Throughout the entire conversation, she had been staring at my face the whole time. But she did so openly and without a trace of ill will, as though she were just admiring a model in a magazine. Besides, since she was only looking without touching, I was much more at ease about the whole thing.

"I'll grab the map and get you something to eat and drink while I'm at it." With that, she once again leaned in close, and murmured by my ear, "You're pretty good at pretending to be a helpless little boy, but you went and spoiled it by asking for a map first instead of food. Tell me, why would a helpless little boy like you want a map more than food after waking from such terrible injuries?"

"..."

Once again, I was reminded that my acting skills were zero. *But with injuries all over and being stuck in a strange place, I'm hardly in a position to leap up and be the big Man, so what else can I do aside from pretend to be a helpless little boy?*

I could only look innocently at Jin Feng. Even if I couldn't act, at least I had this face of mine – *at least I can be a pretty face, right?*

She gave a laugh and stopped critiquing my acting. She just patted my cheek, then stood up and headed to the door.

I almost wanted to touch this overpowered face of mine, in absolute disbelief that this face hadn't gotten all scratched and ripped up from the battle to the point where it was no longer presentable. It had even saved my life, so it seemed the Jiang family's luck really wasn't that bad... Ugh, my hand hurt. I had better not touch it after all.

I turned to watch Jin Feng. It was only when she was a little distance away that I could see her full body clearly. She really was tall and slender, probably reaching over 170 centimeters in height. She was wearing riding breeches and long, leather boots, which showed off her incredibly long legs. Without noticing, my eyes had drifted to her butt. Her butt wasn't as full as her breasts but rather was quite petite, yet at the same time, firm and perky. And her long pony tail even brushed back and forth across that area with every move she made...

Jin Feng suddenly spun around, and I froze, quickly averting my eyes. She gave a smile that was not quite a smile as she looked at me. *Did she find out that I was peeking at her butt?*

"If someone says you're my man, just go with it. With a face like yours, if you don't have someone to protect you... Yeah, I think you get it, too."

I nodded, grimacing.

Jin Feng walked out of the room, and just as the door was closing, I

snuck a look outside. No one was standing watch, so it seemed like I wasn't being kept prisoner... Or they simply thought that my injuries were so bad that they didn't need to have someone watching over me. Rather, if they just let me be, I might just snuff it.

Seizing the chance, I looked over my injuries and my face darkened. That explained why no one was on guard outside. If an ordinary person had gotten these injuries, they'd be confined to bed rest for at least a month, so how could I possibly run away? That also explained why Jin Feng didn't think of me as a helpless little boy. I should have just moaned in pain three times for every sentence I spoke to match my pitiful image of a helpless little boy.

Even for me, I'd need at least five days before I could leave the bed. But it wasn't enough to just climb out of it. This was the city, which was much more dangerous than the suburbs, and there was also the fact that I was even a Jiang, which meant the danger levels probably tripled. If I didn't recover to seventy or eighty percent of my full strength, I probably wouldn't make it out of the city.

Although I really wanted to rush back to Shujun and Dàgē, I'd just be dooming myself if I left prematurely.

If only Dàgē were here. With his healing abilities, my recovery time would at least be halved, but then again, if Dàgē were here, all I'd need to do is just lie back and relax. As if I'd even need to worry about recovery time!

Sigh, whatever. They had Dàgē, Shujun with her godly lightning abilities, a group of superb mercenaries who had progressed pretty

well in training their powers, and a whole bunch of weapons, so they should be fine. The problem was more me, so I was better off worrying about my own injuries. Dàgē and the others would be fine.

I thought hard about what to do. *Right, if I have evolution crystals, I would be able to recover quicker.*

I touched my chest. As expected, the ice crystal bottle used to hold the crystals was gone, but I didn't think for a moment that it had been taken away from me. That intense battle had even shattered the ice shard that protected my heart, and the ice crystal bottle was nowhere near as hard as my ice spear, so it would have been strange if it had survived the fight.

Gazing at the ceiling, I thought back to what had happened before I had fainted the second time. I had seen Jin Feng's hand aflame, and that was in no way an oversized lighter. I could sense that that power was strong enough to kill. Although it wasn't quite first tier, she could trump our mercenaries any time.

So, do these people know about evolution crystals?

As I was thinking, someone entered the room. It wasn't Jin Feng, but a man. He placed a tray next to the bed, looking over my face with a rather ambiguous look on his face, or perhaps even with a little... scorn?

I didn't dare to bring out my zero-point acting skills, and so simply watched him with a little wariness.

"Hmph, boy toy," he muttered to himself then left.

I remained silent, then, hearing no sounds coming from outside the door, I immediately snatched up the map.

The moment I looked at it, my brows knitted tight enough to kill a mosquito. As the name itself indicated, North Avenue district was in the northern part of Zhongguan City, but our home was in the east side, close to the south. It was better than if we were in exact opposite directions. After fully experiencing the luck of the Jiang family, I had been fully prepared for the possibility that I'd have to trek from one end of the city to the other to get home. Although things looked to be much better than that, I still needed to travel through a third of Zhongguan City.

If I could drive through the city without any traffic, it would probably take an hour, but when this was a city filled with aberrants, it was possible that I wouldn't be able to get home even within a lifetime. Worse still, Dàgē had said that they had had no way of leaving the city by car back then because the roads were clogged with traffic, so the road conditions had to be even worse by now.

The other route was to leave the city and go around from the outside. While that would make the traveling distance a lot longer, it was the safer route by far.

I silently committed the two routes to memory, then I returned the map and sipped some water using the straw. I didn't touch any of the food, however. Going from my current condition, I shouldn't be able to eat stuff by myself. Although Jin Feng had said I was pretending to be

sad and helpless, I was pretty sure she didn't know exactly how strong I was. Then again, I couldn't possibly be strong with these kinds of injuries.

Suddenly, loud voices came from outside, though muffled by the door. After all, the door was shut and the sound-proofing wasn't too shabby either, so I had to listen hard to make out what was being said. Although I hadn't chosen the evolution path of strengthening my body, after experiencing the black fog, humanity... no, all living creatures had become better and stronger. The more you experienced the black fog, the stronger you became. But as you became stronger, so did everyone and *everything* else, so you'd be eliminated by the competition if you didn't strengthen yourself quickly enough. And this was a true elimination where you wouldn't even leave a corpse behind, because it would be picked clean.

Aside from that, as you ate more evolution crystals, not only would you grow taller and more beautiful, you'd even become smart enough to score full marks—just kidding. In any case, even if I hadn't chosen to strengthen myself physically with my powers, my body would still improve in all aspects. Otherwise, how could I have developed better combat moves than mercenaries who had experienced the same black fog, after just a few months of training? Even if I had the knowledge, my body wouldn't be able to catch up otherwise.

Anyway, enough BS. In short, I could hear what was being "discussed" by the people shouting outside by concentrating on my hearing. No one should have reached the stage of realizing that "everyone had become stronger," so the girls probably thought that I couldn't hear a thing from inside the room. If I hadn't eaten so many evolution

crystals, I really wouldn't have been able to make out the words. Unfortunately for them, I had been eating evolution crystals like rice since the beginning of the apocalypse.

"Sis, don't tell me you've really fallen for that boy toy?"

Boy toy probably means me? I'd directly skipped over from a helpless little boy to a boy toy. But that was fine by me. People might not necessarily want a helpless little boy, but a boy toy had its fans.

"He's called Xiao Yu." This was probably Jin Feng speaking.

"Who cares what he's called?! He's just a useless boy toy!"

"Xiaoyue, you're becoming wilder and wilder." Despite the meaning in Jin Feng's words, she didn't sound unhappy. "Even someone who's hardly at home like Gē says you've changed a lot."

"I-I was just..." Xiaoyue's voice softened, and I almost couldn't catch her words. I focused even more of my energy on eavesdropping. "I'm just worried about you, Sis."

Jin Feng spoke with amusement, "I never said that it was a bad thing. Ever since you were little, you've had poor health. Mom treated you precious, so you grew up like a dainty white flower. I couldn't even be bothered to talk to you. But I didn't think that you'd turn so wild after that fog came. Quite the unexpected bonus."

"I just lost my memories. I don't remember my past, so forget that past me. The me right now is the real me!"

...Since when did losing your memories become so commonplace? I've never heard of the black fog making people amnesic!

"Cool," Jin Feng said carelessly. "Anyway, I prefer this you as well, but remember to put on an act in front of Mom. You know she's not used to your current personality, and she keeps insisting that you're not you."

"Like it matters!" Xiaoyue snapped back impatiently, "Sis, throw out that boy toy already! Didn't I tell you, you absolutely have to get together with Jiang Shutian?!"

It was strange to hear Dàgē's name unexpectedly pop up in the conversation. *Don't tell me this Xiaoyue knows my dàgē, and is even planning on introducing her sister to my dàgē? But I have to say, good taste!*

But I'm not that bad either. I suddenly felt a little jealous.

Jin Feng said with irritation, "How can I get together with that Jiang Shutian if I've never even met him before?"

Jin Xiaoyue quickly said, "You'll definitely meet him in the future. Brother already said he lives nearby. Sis, you know, that's the *Ice Emperor*, Jiang Shutian!"

What?

I felt like I'd been struck by lightning.

Jin Feng sighed and said helplessly, "Another one of your dreams?" "Yes!" Xiaoyue exclaimed excitedly, "We already have the Thunder God, Jin Zhan, so once we have the Ice Emperor, Jiang Shutian, we can rule the world! So remember that boy toy of yours is for playing only, okay? Don't think of something stupid like getting together for real with him. That kind of freeloading moocher's useless."

Thunder God... Jin Zhan... is it now? "Jin" was indeed a very rare surname, and although I still couldn't remember the name, it sounded vaguely familiar. So it might be that.

"Xiao Yu doesn't seem that weak. He doesn't even complain despite all those injuries—he's definitely stronger than most people." Jin Feng remarked breezily, "And even if he's a moocher, so what? I have the ability to let him mooch off me."

If I were a man, I'd probably explode with fury after hearing this Xiaoyue continually insult me with "moocher" and "boy toy." Thankfully, I was a woman on the inside. No woman would object to being called pretty. *To be a boy toy, I'd have to have an attractive face!*

"Sis, Jiang Shutian's definitely a hundred times better than him! Since Gē actually knows the Ice Emperor, you have to seize this chance!"

When you need him the most, even if you walk until your feet fell off, there won't be any sign of Ice Emperor Jiang Shutian. But then he'll pop up in the most unexpected of places when you aren't even looking!

But wait, Dàgē is a healer! I frowned. *What's going on with this Xiaoyue? Don't tell me this is another kind of ability?*

Abilities had always come in all shapes and forms, so it wasn't impossible to have the ability to have prophetic dreams. *But Dàgē is a healer, so just how accurate are her predictions? Then again, she was able to come up with the Thunder God and Ice Emperor...*

"How am I supposed to seize the chance when I don't even know where he is? Besides, based on what Gē said, he likes calling all the shots. I've got zero interest in guys like that."

No wonder I'm lying on your bed. You don't like a man who's a real man, but meek little guys like me?

"Of course he calls all the shots," Jin Xiaoyue grated through ground teeth. "He's the Ice Emperor, Jiang Shutian!"

"Speaking of the Ice Emperor, didn't you say that you dreamed he was in Glacia? But as it turns out, Gē said he's in Meisia. So maybe your dreams aren't that accurate."

I couldn't help but nod in agreement. *That's right. Dàgē's a healer, so how can he become the Ice Emperor?*

Jin Xiaoyue actually growled deeply in a girl's voice, "There's no mistake. Ice Emperor Jiang Shutian, Thunder God Jin Zhan, Flame King Debert. These are the three elites of humanity!"

She knows about the elites? And she even knows the name of the Flame King. I wasn't aware that prophetic dreams are so comprehensive? And this is just the start of the apocalypse. If she can learn so much through her abilities already, this is more than just talent, she can directly ascend to godhood!

This Xiaoyue, the "amnesic" Xiaoyue. Perhaps... she's the same as me?

"But Jiang Shutian *is* in Meisia. Gē already told us that Jiang Shutian personally came to buy firearms from him on the day of the black fog."

Calm down and think. Dàgē is indeed here, but if not for the fact that the reincarnated me had forced him to come back, he'd probably be in Glacia, like Xiaoyue said.

But Dàgē's ability isn't ice, but healing—wait, Dàgē probably gained healing abilities because he wanted to heal his own dìdi too much. If he didn't come back to Meisia, he wouldn't need to heal me, so he might've gained ice powers instead?

This was a huge revelation.

Yes, this Jin Xiaoyue doesn't have prophetic dreams. She had probably reincarnated, like me, but I didn't know if she was an original resident in this world or a resident of my world. This whole "parallel universe" thing was too complex for me.

Xiaoyue enunciated every word with firm decisiveness, "It doesn't matter which continent Jiang Shutian is on. What matters is that he *will* become the Ice Emperor in the future, and we *have* to get hold of

him!"

Hearing her words, my head started hurting even more than my chest.

Of the three elites of humanity, one of them has been knocked out by butterfly effect little old me created?

Suddenly, I felt a huge pressure crushing me. I had to become strong enough to fill in the shoes left by the missing Ice Emperor; otherwise, I'd be the ultimate criminal of all history for making humanity only have two elites left—no, I'd be the *future* ultimate criminal.

Jin Feng said coolly, "If Gē and Jiang Shutian are the Thunder God and Ice Emperor respectively, then they'd never be able to ally together. You can only have one leader in a team."

"That won't be a problem once you become Jiang Shutian's woman!"

I frowned. I felt like there was something off about this, but I couldn't quite put my finger on exactly what it was.

There was some silence before Jin Feng finally spoke. "Xiaoyue, it's good that you've become more unrestrained, but it's not nice to be so pushy. You're treating your own sister like a pawn."

"... Sorry, I-I was just worried about the future."

Jin Feng responded with "mm," then reminded her anxiously, "Remember to act like a good girl in front of Mom, okay? Otherwise she'll start crying when she sees you, and Gē won't be happy."

"Fine," Xiaoyue said reluctantly.

It became quiet outside again, but soon enough, Jin Feng pushed open the door and entered.

"I thought you were planning to chat all day outside." I gave her puppy eyes, then looked at the food on the table. "I'm so hungry."

Jin Feng chuckled and came by the bed. She picked up the bowl and started spoon-feeding me the rice porridge, which had bits of minced meat inside. After being left in the open for so long, it had cooled down to the perfect temperature for eating.

After eating and drinking my fill, I gave a content sigh, then looked at Jin Feng next to me and asked in puzzlement, "Why are you so nice to me?"

Even with this face of mine, there's no need to personally spoon-feed me, you know. You're the younger sister of Thunder God Jin Zhan! I can't bear such a heavy responsibility!

Jin Feng chuckled. "You're my man. Who else should I be taking care of apart from you?"

Um, don't tell me you have a thing for making moves on the heavily injured?

Probably because I was glaring at her, Jin Feng laughed again and gave me another ruffle of my hair. *Seriously, please stop doing that. You'll make me miss Dàgē and the others. I'm very worried, you know!*

"Don't worry, I will woo you the proper way."

W-woo me?

Okay, with a face like Jiang Shuyu's, it wasn't exactly the first time that the girl was chasing after the guy. I mean, I'd been chased by the school Madonna! But Madonna completely had nothing on the Thunder God's younger sister. *Jiang Shuyu, your face is too amazing!*

Jin Feng methodically picked up the fruit that served as dessert: an apple. Then, she pulled out a palm-sized knife and started peeling it. The peeled skin was so thin that it was translucent, and she peeled it in one go, creating a complete ribbon of unbroken apple skin.

But compared to the skin, I was more concerned about the apple itself. *Why do you still have apples? Does your family run an apple orchard or something?*

Slowly and deliberately, she said, "I won't force you to marry me."

M-Marry? Shit, Miss, we've known each other for just a day. What kind of shotgun wedding is this?

But I did feel better when I heard her say "marry." She really had to have very strong morals to still think of marriage in the apocalypse. It seemed I wouldn't have to worry that I would be XXX'ed, which was good news for me... *I think?*

I couldn't help but steal a look at Jin Feng's chest, but she noticed it

and immediately whacked me on the head again.

I protested, "Don't hit my head, I'll become stupid!"

"Fine. Your broken ribs, broken hands, broken legs. Pick what you want me to hit."

"...Okay, go for my head."

Jin Feng laughed and raised her hand. Just as I was bracing myself for the next hit, she rubbed my head, saying, "If you agree to marriage and become my husband, then you can look all you want, anywhere you want. I won't hit you. How about it?"

Wait, it should be that I agree to date you, right? How did we jump straight to marriage?

I looked at Jin Feng. She looked serious, without any hint that she was joking at all, so I had no choice but to reply, "This is too fast. Can we discuss this after we've gotten to know each other better?"

Thankfully, she gave an amiable nod of her head.

As I watched, Jin Feng quietly cut the apple into pieces, not the slightest bit angry at all. Only when I saw that she wasn't upset did I dare to ask, "Miss Jin Feng, can I ask you a question?"

"Call me Feng. Shoot."

"Oh, okay." I smoothly changed my way of addressing her. "Feng, you

saw me being dropped by the bird. Did you see where that red bird went?"

I was worried that the carrion-bloom bird would circle back to find Dàgē and the others. Although the bird didn't have the help of his flock, so Dàgē and the others should be able to manage the lone tier one carrion-bloom bird, I still couldn't help but worry about them.

Jin Feng sliced the apple into tiny pieces and fed me one piece before responding, "It didn't go anywhere. We took it down."

"With what?" I was astonished. *Did the Thunder God already learn how to fly? He can't be that powerful, right?*

"Three Barretts."

...There's really no point in comparisons.

I became a bit depressed. It seemed like the Thunder God was faring better than the Ice Emperor at this stage of the apocalypse. Then, I abruptly became upset. *My dàgē should be the strongest!*

Wait, if Dàgē had stayed in Glacia instead of coming back, he'd probably have kept his entire mercenary troop and could use Barretts like they were handguns, so how can he possibly lose to the Thunder God?!

But because I called him back, we don't have any Barretts, and we even lost an Ice Emperor.

I became even more depressed.

"What are you thinking about? You're frowning real hard," Jin Feng reached out to smooth out my brow, but she frowned along with me. I was imagining the scene where I would be scorned by the whole of humanity after the truth came to light.

Ten years after the apocalypse, humanity was already struggling so much even with three elites. Now that we're down to two, can humanity even survive?

Can I really replace Dàgē and become the Ice Emperor?

I couldn't help but touch my chest. My hands hurt, my chest hurt even more, and there was nothing there. The ice shard had long shattered and disappeared. I had failed over and over again in creating a weapon. Feeling like the distance between the Ice Emperor and me was as far as the center of Earth and outer space, I couldn't help but sink into depression.

"Xiao Yu."

I looked at Jin Feng.

She rubbed my head, saying, "Sleep. Your injuries are too severe. Don't think too much right now. The more you think, the worse it'll get. So just go to bed."

I looked at her and said seriously, "I need a long time to recover."

Nowadays, people would be abandoned even if they didn't have a scratch on them, much less someone with severe injuries.

"Yeah, the doc says you need a month of bed rest, and almost three months before you can make a full recovery. But I don't think you'll need that long."

Shit! I'd completely forgotten about the doctor. I was screwed. They would definitely find out how quickly I recovered. My original plan of lying in for two weeks then running away had gone out of the window. The doctor would definitely realize something was up with just a check up!

"Open your mouth."

More food? Am I a pig being fattened? I looked at Jin Feng with a frown, only to see a single clear crystal in her hand.

An evolution crystal.

Footnotes

¹ **"Xiao Yu":** Shuyu's "yu" uses the character 宇 from yǔzhòu (宇宙), which means "universe." The "yu" sounds exactly the same as the yu (羽) from yǔmáo (羽毛), which means "feather."

Chapter 5: The Phoenix of Good Fortune

After eating the evolution crystal, I could finally take it easy, lie back, and relax. Even if I recovered too quickly, it might be because one particular evolution crystal was especially powerful. *It has nothing to do with me, okay?*

Lying there on the bed was extremely dull, and I really wanted to secretly slip out of bed and walk around to exercise. However, a certain somebody kept staring at me relentlessly, so I had no choice but to just lie there like a good boy.

I said expressionlessly, "Can you please stop staring at me?"

He replied with a bright smile, "Nope. Dàjiě wants me to take good care of you!"

I looked him over. Ben was a fourteen year old youngster who was fairly short. Fortunately for him, he wasn't too skinny or frail—if anything, he looked like he carried a bit of bulk. His somewhat dark skin and sunken eyes marked him a possible mixed blood, but his extremely local accent suggested that he had grown up in this country.

Although he called Jin Feng "Dàjiě," there was no way he was her little brother. Feng had mentioned that she only had an older brother, Jin Zhan, and a little sister called Jin Xiaoyue, making her the middle child. Her family structure was identical to mine... *No wait, what am I talking about? Feng's a girl and I'm a guy, so how can we be the same? We both just happen to be part of a trio of brothers and sisters.*

Pretty much everyone here called Feng "Dàjiě," and this wasn't in the sense of "older sister" but rather, "big sis," the head of a syndicate or organization.

So the Thunder God was part of the triad, while Dàgē had his own mercenaries to lead. I wondered about the Flame King's background. He probably wasn't ordinary either. No wonder they could become rulers in the apocalyptic world—they already had established footholds in the world, so how could us commoners possibly compare?

Actually, that wasn't quite true. There were plenty of people with extraordinary backgrounds, but in the end, only three of them had become humanity's elites. Anyway, all hail dàgēs! Regardless of whether it was my dàgē or Jin Feng's, they were both awesome!

"Besides, your expressions are pretty fun. It would be a waste not to watch!" Ben remarked in amazement, "No wonder Dàjiě likes you so much. You're good looking and interesting. If I were a girl, I'd also kidnap you to be my trophy husband."

I immediately wiped the emotions off my face. "I wasn't kidnapped."

Ben burst into hysterical laughter. He was clearly pulling my leg just now. It was obvious he didn't believe me, but I couldn't care less about that. In any case, people here viewed me as the boy toy that Jin Feng had taken in under her wing—and it was true. Jin Feng was giving me food, water, and evolution crystals, and in return, I lay on her bed and rested my body. *If that isn't being a boy toy, what is?*

At night, Jin Feng would come back to the room and even sleep next

to me. If I weren't so grievously injured that all she could do was stroke my face and ruffle my hair, we'd have to censor what was happening!

"Xiao Yu, you're almost done recovering from your wounds, right?" Ben asked with a grin.

Like hell I am! I've only been resting for six days! Let's see you go fight a tier-one bird and get bashed by another one. I guarantee there won't be anything left of you to bury!

But I was indeed much better. My recovery speed was much faster than I had expected, and that was all thanks to the evolution crystals that Jin Feng had fed me. By now, any evolution crystals that were lower than tier one didn't help much in making me stronger, but they were more than up to the task of acting as healing remedies.

"You should be calling me Xiao Yu-gē," I said with dissatisfaction.

Ben glanced at me and gave a cold sniff. "I'll only call Jin 'Gē' and Feng 'Jiě.' I don't give a crap about anyone else!" Then, he added with a wide grin, "But, if you actually got together with my dàjiě, then I can compromise and call you brother-in-law."

"What about Jin Xiaoyue?" I was extremely curious about this girl who seemed to have reincarnated as well. I'd originally thought that since she so strongly objected to me, she would come rushing in to give me a huge scolding, but in the end, I never saw hide nor hair of her. For the past six days, the only people I'd seen were Ben and the people delivering the food.

Ben's smile stiffened and, scratching his head, he remarked, "I've never really spoken to the Missus. I mean, I've only ever seen her a few times. If not for this situation, a well-educated university student like her would've never come to our gang. Besides, Missus was always weak and sickly, so Jin-gē forbade her from coming over, because he thought that us gangsters would freak her out."

Weak? Sickly? That sure wasn't what she sounded like that day.

Although she definitely had the bell-like voice of a girl, she was shouting pretty loudly without a trace of fragility anywhere to be heard... *Wait, if she's like me and reincarnated once, is she still herself?*

Thinking back to the conversation that day, I suddenly felt that this Xiaoyue was probably no longer the Xiaoyue they'd known. But while I had come clean to Dàgē and Shujun, Jin Xiaoyue had chosen to hide it, using amnesia and dreams as cover ups.

No wonder Jin Feng had already trained herself to be even stronger than the mercenaries at this stage of the apocalypse. With tips from Jin Xiaoyue and the support of the triad, she probably ate more evolution crystals than our mercenaries. I mean, she even had enough to feed her little boy toy, though she probably hadn't reached tier one yet. I had to wonder how fast Jin Zhan had progressed.

Just as I was pondering that question, the door opened. I looked over with a little suspicion. It wasn't meal time just yet—*could Jin Feng be back?* Even Ben, who was sitting to one side, stood up with a smile, evidently thinking the same thing as me.

But instead of a well-endowed, cool woman, we got a big, buff Hulk instead. Hulk was both tall and wide, with huge, bulging muscles. On first glance, you'd have mistaken him for a walking mountain. Even I was turned off by how much muscle there was, and this was coming from someone who could drool at the sight of my own dàgē's biceps.

This muscled guy was too eye catching, so it was not until he stepped into the room that I spotted another man standing next to him. He looked much more normal, a bespectacled man with a cold expression. When he stared at me, he made no effort whatsoever to hide his look of disgust. There was even some hatred mixed into his expression.

I frowned. I'd gotten quite a lot of cold looks this past little while, aside from Jin Feng and Ben. Everyone serving my meals had given me varying looks of disdain, but never to the extent of hatred. *I mean, what is there to hate about a boy toy who is so badly injured?*

It might have been a different story if they knew that I was eating evolution crystals, but Jin Feng had specifically told me not to tell anyone else about it. She'd even banned the doctor from coming to check on my injuries, and she'd personally helped me change my bandages after she returned each night, all to conceal the fact that I was recovering way too quickly from my injuries.

Back then, Jin Feng had said, *"It's not a big deal if they find out, really. It's just a pain in the ass if some of the guys start kicking up a fuss. Anyway, if you feel like something's not right with your wounds, let me know and I'll get the doc to look at you."*

But no doctor visits was exactly what I'd wanted, so I'd immediately sworn to her that I would never let the cat out of the bag. Jin Feng had ruffled my hair then and just said, "*Good boy.*"

That had troubled me greatly— *so I wasn't a boy toy but a pet?*

"Oldman Jun and Hu Zong? What're you doing here?" Ben asked suspiciously, "I don't think Feng-jiě asked you guys to come?"

Hulk said roughly, "Jus' wanna see what this bastard who dares to sleep in Feng-jiě's room looks like."

Ben snorted and asked mockingly, "Oldman Jun, since when did you become interested in guys as well?"

Hulk immediately exploded with fury, roaring, "Who th' *fuck* are ya sayin' is into guys?!"

I suddenly worried that the Hulk known as Oldman Jun would charge in to knock Ben down, but Ben didn't seem at all concerned. He just continued sitting by the bed with a broad grin, clearly unafraid of pissing off these guys. He even continued poking fun at the other guy.

"Hu Zong, c'mon, watcha looking so angry for? S'not like I owe you a million or something. C'mon, gimme a smile."

Hu Zong's expression darkened even further, and he said coldly, "Ben, so you're on the side of that boy toy?"

"Ben only stands on two people's sides—Jin-gē's and Feng-jiě's.

Everyone else, forget about me standing on their side, I'd even kick them down to hell if need be! As for this guy, he's under Feng-jiě's protection, so if you got a problem with that, go say it to Dàjiě's face. I mean, guys, coming here to bully a poor little patient we kidnapped from the streets? Really now?"

I really wasn't kidnapped, okay?! What's more, Jin Feng is my savior, so I feel bad that everyone is casting her to be some brutish woman who kidnapped an innocent, pretty boy for herself!

But namedropping Jin Feng was extremely effective. Hu Zong scowled and even a buff guy like Oldman Jun immediately started to give off nervous vibes and no longer dared to raise his voice.

Ben gave a disdainful snort, then said huffily, "Guys, I think you've gotten the situation the wrong way around. Since when could anyone even lay a finger on Feng-jiě? It's always been Dàjiě getting her hands on whatever *she* wanted. You think that this fellow lying there on the bed would even have a say in the matter?"

"..." I continued maintaining my stoic silence.

Oldman Jun couldn't rebut that at all, so he changed the subject and grumbled, "What's so good 'bout this boy toy? The only thing he's got goin' is his face!"

Ben replied boldly, "Yup, Dàjiě likes that face of his. So if you've got balls, go get plastic surgery. Maybe *then* you'll have a chance of winning Dàjiě's heart!"

Are you trying to scare the crap out of someone, putting my face on top of that mountain-like, muscular body?

Oldman Jun's face went white, and he immediately retorted, "Like hell I wanna win Dàjiě's heart! Don't go spoutin' that bullshit! Once Jin-gē is back, he'll definitely gut that boy!"

I started. He was absolutely right. Anyone would flip out after suddenly discovering that your little sister had randomly picked some guy to be her husband. To top it off, that person was a useless boy toy. If this happened to Shujun, Dàgē and I would definitely slaughter that guy on the spot before anything else, no questions asked.

Ben gave Oldman Jun a look that clearly said, "*You. IDIOT.*"

"Jin-gē only ever gets involved in matters relating to Madam and Missus. When has he ever butted into Feng-jiě's affairs? In our gang, the one calling the shots isn't just Jin-gē but Dàjiě too! And even if Jin-gē suddenly goes crazy and decides to stick his nose in, do you *seriously* think Dàjiě will throw her boy toy out on the street just because Jin-gē objects to him?"

Whew. I breathed a sigh of relief. It was great that Jin Feng was so awesome. I really didn't want to get beaten to a pulp by the Thunder God when I was still so badly injured.

Once Ben had spoken, a clear look of hesitation crept across Oldman Jun's face. He really was a simple-minded brute who wore his heart on his sleeve—he didn't seem the kind to plot or scheme at all.

So if Oldman Jun had been speaking the truth and didn't think of Jin Feng that way, he'd probably come charging over because someone else had provoked him. If the provoker wasn't the super sneaky type to hide himself away, then that left only Mr. Spectacles, Hu Zong, as the suspect. Although the guy looked decent enough, he gave off the impression that he was plotting something nefarious. Right from the start, he had been staring at me coldly, so he was probably the provoker.

"Feng-jiě's just a woman, so she can't help but fall for a boy toy's pretty words," Hu Zong snapped viciously. "All we have to do is to put a gash in that face, then let's see who still wants him!"

"Dream on, Hu Zong," Ben said coldly. "I can give you and Oldman Jun a pass for barging into Feng-jiě's room, 'cause you wanted but failed to win Feng-jiě's heart. But if you dare to raise a hand against *Feng-jiě's* people in *Feng-jiě's* room, you're going down, sucker!"

When he heard that, a look of fear crossed Oldman Jun's face, and I was greeted with the highly disturbing sight of a big, muscular guy cowering in fear. *A guy like you must really have muscles for brains if you dare to create trouble, when you're all bark but no bite!*

Ben shouted, in the cracking voice of an adolescent boy, "I'm giving you one last chance. Get out!"

Oldman Jun looked like he really wanted to go, but instead, he looked at Hu Zong, as though seeking his permission. *I knew it. That guy's the mastermind.*

Hu Zong stared at Ben and frowned, his icy demeanor melting a bit, and then he said coldly, "We're leaving!"

Then, the two were gone. And this was after I'd already come up with how to take a punch that would result in a pitiful look that wouldn't ruin my handsomeness. Then, when Jin Feng was back, I'd start crying to her about how pitiful I was, and how she should give me two more evolution crystals to make up for it.

But they'd gone and run away with tails between their legs after being yelled at a few times. *Guys, can you be any more pathetic? What happened to punching me in my face?* I became extremely despondent.

"Don't worry!" Ben grinned at me as he spoke, "Feng-jiě's really something. Since she said to protect you, I, Ben, will make sure not even a hair on you is harmed."

Don't make promises you can't keep, you fourteen year old. That Oldman Jun's arm is thicker than your thigh.

Probably because he could see the disbelief in my eyes, Ben harrumphed twice, whipped out a knife from the side of his calf, and started peeling an apple, once again creating a ribbon of skin so thin that it was translucent.

There *had* to be an apple tree nearby. The fruit accompanying my meals for the past six days were apples and apples, and I resolutely added this fruit to my food black list, alongside chicken soup and Chinese medicinal porridge!

Ben stabbed an apple piece with a fork and held it out, saying, "I've been with Feng-jiě for quite a few years. Feng-jiě can become so intimidating that she doesn't lose out to Jin-gē. It's like she's not a woman at all! And I've never seen her showing any interest in any guys either, so I've always thought that Feng-jiě was a man through and through, and she might end up having to get together with a woman. But now she actually likes a guy! So yeah, I'll definitely take good care of you."

I silently listened to Ben's chatter.

I'd originally expected that I'd need two weeks of bed rest, but after being fed evolution crystals a few times, I was making good progress. If not for the fact that I had to hide how fast my body was recovering, I'd have taken care of my daily necessities by myself already. But if I had to go into combat, then my wounds might worsen, and it would drag out my recovery time.

I made some estimates and concluded that ten days of bed rest would be the best. But I couldn't hold back my worry about things back home any longer. I wanted to set off tomorrow. At the most, I would do my best in avoiding aberrants and keep fighting to a minimum.

"Feng-jiě, you're back?" Ben sprang to his feet gleefully.

Hearing that, I immediately turned to look, just in time to see Jin Feng entering the room. She was even holding onto a tray, and seeing that I had turned my head to look at her, she asked, "Are you hungry?"

Suddenly, my conscience twanged. Jin Feng had been heading out

early and returning late in the evening every day for these past six days. Even an idiot could tell that she was probably out there, hunting for aberrants. And the moment she was back, she'd bring food and even the occasional crystal to feed her boy toy. But this boy toy was planning to run away in two days' time.

After getting rescued, eating and drinking my fill, and even swallowing down evolution crystals, I was planning to leave, just like that. Even *I* felt like I was being a real dick!

"I'm okay," I responded honestly. These few days, all I'd done was sip at drinks when offered and open my mouth when fed, so I really hadn't had the chance to become hungry.

Jin Feng didn't seem to mind and came over. She set down the tray and said, "Eat more. The doc says that you won't have much of an appetite because of the pain from your injuries, but you have to eat."

I'm not suffering from aching wounds, but an overdose of apples.

I nodded. Jin Feng then sat down and started feeding me. Today's meal was curry rice. *Mm, delicious. How'd I forget to hoard curry cubes back then?*

Ben spoke up gravely, "Dàjiě, Hu Zong brought Oldman Jun over to stir up some trouble. But all they did was just yap a little. They definitely didn't touch a hair on Xiao Yu's body."

A look of dismay flashed across Jin Feng's face. Then, she spoke as if she were perfectly fine, "Okay. You can leave now, we'll discuss this

later.”

Ben's solemn look immediately vaporized, and he said with a grin, “Sure, Feng-jiě, Ben knows what to do. He won't be a third wheel!” He then gave me a meaningful twitch of the eyebrow and sauntered out while whistling a merry tune. He really was too smart and cheeky for his age.

“I'll deal with those two. I'll send over one more body as well.” Jin Feng fed me another spoonful of curry rice as she continued, “Ben's quite good but he's still young, so he can't intimidate people.”

I shook my head as I replied, “I'm fine. Please don't punish them.”

If Jin Feng punished them for all the world to see, wouldn't she become the laughing stock once I ran away? Especially since she was in a triad. After having lived in the apocalypse for so many years, I knew all too well how these organizations operated. The moment the boss's authority was destroyed, things turned bad very quickly.

“It's nothing to do with you. The fact that they entered the room without my permission is already breaking the rules. If they'd entered my brother's room, they would've been gunned down on the spot, no reports needed.”

Another gloomy look flickered across her face, and she remarked blandly, “I guess I'm still too soft-hearted.” Then, she frowned, asking with a trace of bewilderment, “I've killed no small amount of aberrants recently. And when I burn them with fire, the mess afterwards looks much worse than if I had used a gun. So why do people still think I'm

not tough enough?"

"Probably because you're too soft on me!" After a moment's silence, I couldn't help but ask, "Why *are* you so nice to me?"

She didn't reply immediately. Instead, she mused for a long while before she finally spoke.

"At the time, I had heard some noise, so I went over to check it out. I thought it was probably an aberrant, but instead I saw a person lying on the ground, surrounded by ice shards and red feathers like pieces of fire. His face was so white that it was almost transparent. I'm bad with words, so I dunno how to describe that image. But it was beautiful. When you looked over at me, I almost thought you weren't human, but some kind of aberrant that had evolved toward beauty. But thankfully you spoke in the very next moment. From that moment on, I decided I'd protect you. It'd be such a pity if someone as beautiful as you became an ugly aberrant once you died."

I listened quietly. Her words made her sound like the president of the world-wide superficiality club, but her tone of voice was telling a different story, like she was saying how artwork like the *Mona Lisa* should be properly preserved, and who cared why?

"I have family who's still alive."

"Mhmm."

"You knew?" I was a bit surprised.

"You wanted a map."

"I'll leave."

"You'll die."

I pondered for a moment before replying, "I don't mind if it's for family."

For whatever reason, Jin Feng laughed at that and said with a nod, "For sure. So when are you leaving?"

I was stunned. I never imagined that Jin Feng would accept the fact so easily. Just now, I'd instantly regretted it the moment I mentioned my departure. If Jin Feng was aware of my plans, then there'd be many more obstacles when I needed to escape. But at the same time, I couldn't just run away from my savior without saying a thing. It weighed too heavily on my conscience.

After struggling for a long while, I gritted my teeth and told her the truth, "Tomorrow."

Jin Feng made an assenting sound and then asked, "Do you know how to shoot?"

"Yes."

"Oh?" Curiosity lit up in Jin Feng's eyes, and she asked, "How good are you? Where'd you learn?"

"My dàgē is a mercenary..."

We chatted for a while, and at some point, I fell asleep mid-conversation. When I woke up, I found myself still lying in the same room.

I lifted my hands—no cuffs. I lifted my leg—no shackles.

I lay there quietly for a while but didn't hear anything. Slowly, I sat up and lowered my feet to the ground, and then I stood. My legs threatened to buckle but I steadied myself. I didn't have any problems moving my hands and feet, so I was more or less there in terms of recovery. Although my chest still hurt, my limbs seemed just fine. I walked to the door, took in a deep breath, and reached out to turn the door knob. The door opened, with an audible click of a lock opening. Evidently, the door had been locked from the inside.

I stuck my head out to see a long, deserted corridor outside.

I closed the door again, making sure to lock it again. Then, I proceeded to wash up in the bathroom. As I brushed my teeth, I regarded my reflection in the mirror. I had become skinnier than when I had just recovered from the fight with Muscle Man and Lin-bó. I looked skinny and frail, but I wasn't too concerned about that. Once I returned to Shujun's side, did I even have to worry about weight?

My reflection couldn't help but curl his mouth up in a smile. *What're you smiling at? All you did was read Jin Feng right! What's there to be so happy about, when all that's happened is that you haven't been locked up, and no one's standing watch over you after you confessed*

your plans?

I ran out of things to do after washing up. Just as I was starting to get hungry, the door opened. I'd thought that it was Ben delivering breakfast for today, and dashed back to bed to pretend to be the sickly patient. But to my surprise, the person entering was Jin Feng. She was holding onto a tray in her left hand and a large bundle of stuff in her right. I really had no idea how she had opened the door, but I knew how she closed it, at least—by kicking it shut.

Seeing me lying in bed, she raised an eyebrow, remarking, "Still pretending? You're planning to leave today anyway, so there's no way you can't get out of bed."

I chuckled and sat up in bed.

Jin Feng set down the tray. "Breakfast."

Great timing. I was famished, so I made puppy eyes at Feng. However, she just rummaged in the stuff she had carried in and showed no intention of coming over to feed me.

After a long while, Jin Feng finally noticed my stare of eager anticipation and looked over. She gave me a puzzled look, and asked, "Why aren't you eating?" Then, she started and said with amusement, "What, you want me to feed you?"

"No!" I immediately replied and quickly picked up the utensils and started eating the breakfast. I'd gotten used to being fed, so I'd almost forgotten that I had hands I could use to feed myself. It sure is

easy to go from rags to riches, but hard to go back. I really couldn't afford being pampered one more day with the spoon-fed food.

Jin Feng came by the bed and took away the utensils in my hands. While I was still stunned, she started going through the moves of feeding me.

"Why's it rice and not porridge?" In the past six days, I'd mainly been eating porridge.

"A sick person eats porridge because it's easy to digest. But are you sick?" Jin Feng spoke slowly and in a matter-of-fact voice, "Besides, you're leaving today, so you should eat rice so you won't get hungry so easy. No one out there's gonna feed you, so eat more now. Don't give me any more excuses about not being able to eat."

I obediently polished off everything on the tray, not even leaving a scrap of apple behind either.

After the meal, Jin Feng piled the dining utensils to one side and ordered, "Stand up so I can have a look."

I again stood up obediently to let her enjoy the view, and I even did a 360 degree turn and gave Jin Feng a beautiful smile, fulfilling my duties as a boy toy.

Jin Feng coughed and chuckled, "You're so skinny. What's there to see?"

...In the end, I fail at being a boy toy. I protested, explaining, "I wasn't

so skinny, and I even had muscle! I just lost weight after getting injured."

Jin Feng quirked a smile, giving me no clue whether she believed me or not, and just shoved a backpack at me, remarking, "I've prepared a fair amount of food for you. Eat more and you'll bulk up. Now come over and change."

She tossed over a set of clothing, complete with shoes. I didn't complain and immediately changed into them. The outfit was quite simple: a T-shirt, jeans, and a vest, pretty much the same style I'd worn before. Jin Feng was quite something to be able to guess what those scraps of cloth had originally looked like.

"Take a look at the supplies."

I curiously stepped forward for a look. It was a large hiking backpack, with one Desert Eagle and one knife jutting out from the side pockets. Next to it, a set of belts had been laid out, complete with holsters for a knife and gun. These holsters weren't empty, either, as there was a knife and an automatic already in them.

Jin Feng had even prepared weapons for me.

She said carelessly, "Most of the stuff in the bag is food and water. I've only prepared two guns for you. The ammo is in the bag. Don't use the guns unless you absolutely have to. Gunshots will attract a lot of aberrants, and you won't be able to finish them all off on your own or scare them away. Use the knife as much as possible to deal with them."

My eyelid twitched as I suddenly realized a problem. I adopted a puzzled look and asked, "'Aberrant'? You keep using that word. Do you mean those monsters?"

Jin Feng nodded, speaking lightly, "Yeah, everyone here calls them aberrants."

"Huh."

I was growing more and more certain that that Jin Xiaoyue had come from the same world as me, and that person had an even better memory than me. She was even able to remember the names of the three human elites.

Has Xiaoyue reached tier one yet? Back when she had been chatting with Jin Feng outside the room door, I hadn't been able to sense the strength of her powers, but that could be because she was too powerful, so I had no way of detecting the true extent of her powers. Jin Feng picked up the set of belts and helped me fasten it, then lifted the backpack onto my back. Then, she looked me over, and laughed as she shook her head. "You look like a kid wearing adult clothes with those guns."

"I'm a pretty sharp shot!" I snapped back.

"You better be." Jin Feng patted my back, saying, "Go, while most of the gang isn't around. I'll take you out to avoid any trouble."

She's letting me go, just like that? I blinked, feeling a little scared.

This was too good to be true. I must have saved up all my good luck in those ten years in the apocalypse in order to meet Jin Feng. Not only did she save me, feed me, and give me supplements, I'd even learned about a bunch of stuff from that Jin Xiaoyue.

Is the Jiang family really supposed to have such good luck? Don't tell me that even the Heavens are making it up to me, because they can't bear seeing my crappy luck that's so bad that I've even run into two tier-one aberrants at the same time, just four months into the apocalypse?

Jin Feng led the way, walking down the long corridor and taking me down many flights of stairs, before bringing me out through the back door.

I looked back and finally saw where I'd been sleeping the past few days. It was a building that was around fourteen to fifteen-stories high. The first to third floors were retail space, and the levels above those were probably all offices.

I frowned, saying, "It must be hard to guard such a large place, right? Won't aberrants and stuff be able to get in?"

I deliberately skipped over the question of "won't people keep coming over for help?" Since she was part of the triad, I probably wouldn't enjoy hearing how they dealt with people, so I avoided asking the question altogether.

"We have a lot of munitions," Jin Feng said simply.

That one sentence almost made me want to run away in tears. *How's it possible for there to be such a big difference between us?!*

"We've killed all the aberrants in the surrounding area. You'll probably need to walk at least ten minutes before you start getting into dangerous territory. Be careful and hurry back to your family. And if..." Jin Feng suddenly stopped. I watched her attentively, waiting for her to finish the sentence.

"If it's not safe where you are, bring your family over." Then, she switched to a more thoughtful tone of voice. "But—I don't think you'll be back, will you?"

I gave a faint smile and said confidently, "Yeah, my dàgē's really amazing."

The Ice Emperor, Jiang Shutian, is my dàgē! Except, I've kind of led him down the wrong path and now he's a healer. Remembering this instantly made me feel a little depressed.

But I'd already decided that we wouldn't live on anyone else's territory, even if the territory belonged to the Thunder God, Jin Zhan. My dàgē was the Ice Emperor, and even if his ability in this life wasn't ice, he'd still become some other kind of emperor. *Haven't you heard of the saying, you can't have two kings on the same throne?*

Besides, at this stage, the Thunder God's organization was simply too powerful. If Dàgē came over, he could only end up serving under someone else, and what kind of a joke was that?! Even if Dàgē was willing, I wasn't!

"What a pity. I quite like you," Jin Feng remarked lightly.

I've been confessed to. I've been confessed to by my savior. I've been confessed to by someone made of money! What should I do?

"Feng, if we ever meet again—" I stopped abruptly, not daring to make any big promises, and finished a little lamely, "—I will feed you instead."

Jin Feng's lips curved in a smile, and she replied, "Sure."

Isn't this the right time for a farewell kiss or something? But I haven't figured out which gender I prefer, so is it really all right if I give her hope?

As I flailed about what to do, Jin Feng stepped up to me, just like that, and I nervously watched her with wide eyes. *T-this... is fine? It's better if you did it rather than me.*

Should I close my eyes...? No! No way in hell is this where a man closes his eyes earlier than a woman!

Jin Feng reached out to pinch my cheeks and chuckled. "Your expressions are really funny."

That's what everyone says.

"Go," Jin Feng said without a trace of reluctance. "If your destination's close by, try to get there before it gets dark."

Although I probably wouldn't be able to make it there today, I just gave a nod of my head. Aberrants weren't any more active at night than they were during the day, but they were usually more of a pain to deal with. They often had night vision, and while humans now had much better vision than before, our sight couldn't hold a candle against theirs.

"Goodbye, Feng," I said my farewell, plagued by feelings of apology and guilt. But then again, she had her Thunder God and I had my Ice Emperor. No matter how dangerous the apocalypse became, with these two protective guardian gods, we'd definitely see each other again. *So I'll make sure to return the favor then.*

"Bye, Xiao Yu."

I steeled myself and turned to leave. Once I was some distance away, I looked back. Jin Feng was still standing there, back straight and head held high, one hand resting on her gun holster. Just her figure alone made her a super cool, hot chick. This woman was pretty much an idol in the making! In my previous life, I'd wanted so badly to become a powerful and strong woman like her, to the point where I'd even dreamed about it. Unfortunately, I'd gone down the wrong path from the very beginning, so I could only put my hopes on my current life.

I couldn't help but yell, "Jin Feng, remember me. I'm called Shuyu, Jiang Shuyu!"

Did she hear me? Just as I was about to turn away, she tilted her head, raised a hand, and stuck out her thumb, looking so cool that I hated

myself for not having a camera with me. I really wanted her autographed picture!

"Jiang Shuyu, live well."

I smiled and gave her the same thumbs-up. Then, without any further delay, I left. As I walked, I gazed at the cluster of tall buildings, the worry and fear in my heart suddenly drifting away. *This woman's a tier one, so what's she got to be afraid of!*

Dàgē, Shujun, wait for me!

Chapter #6: City of Aberrants

I leaned against the utility pole, tipping the bloodstained evolution crystal in my hand into the hip flask. The palm-sized hip flask looked like it was made of silver, a beautifully wrought piece of art, and there was even the name "Feng" engraved on the bottom in ancient Chinese. I had no idea what possessed Jin Feng to put a small hip flask in my backpack. *Did she want to give me some liquid courage?*

Anyway, once I drained the alcohol inside in one gulp, the hip flask became the perfect container for holding evolution crystals. By now, the only use I had for these tierless crystals was for healing, so after popping back a few crystals to heal up, I saved up the rest to give the others when I returned.

But I really wasn't planning on accumulating so many. I just wanted to get home ASAP!

Technically, if I could directly run home, I'd probably reach home after running non-stop for a day and a night. But I couldn't travel in a straight line, and there were so many aberrants in the city that my skin crawled. Although I hadn't yet run into more tier one aberrants, a bunch of tierless aberrants could still mob someone to death!

This was the third day after leaving Jin Feng's. I really missed the days when someone would spoon feed me. Jiggling the hip flask caused the contents to rattle softly. It was a rich harvest, with crystals everywhere to be found in this city. This only made me warier of danger. Judging from the looks of things, I'd been extremely lucky to rise to tier one so early in the suburbs. There was just no comparing

the dangers in the city to those found in the suburbs.

No, it was the Jiang family's rotten luck that even made the city seem like heaven when compared to the suburbs. *Just how many tier one aberrants have I encountered? I killed one myself. Then, there was the brainwight and the two birds, averaging one a month. What the hell? This isn't some monthly cycle like a period, okay?*

In my previous life, Guan Weijun had only seen her first tier one aberrant after spending a good six months on the run in the city, and she'd turned tail after seeing it in the distance.

I really didn't know how to feel about this rotten luck. Although it had let me reach tier one even while living in the suburbs, it had also separated me from Dàgē and Shujun... *Sigh, whatever.* I just needed to get back to them. *Come to think of it, I also need to fill in the shoes of the Ice Emperor, so it's not like I can slack off. All right, be as rotten as you want!*

Tucking away the hip flask, I pulled out the map to check that I was headed in the right direction. Although I was going to make it out of Zhongguan City soon, it was dark and conditions weren't great for travel. After assessing the various factors, I had no choice but to put aside my impatience in wanting to see Dàgē and Xiaomèi as soon as possible. *All right, I'll hole up for the night, and aim to get home before tomorrow night so I can enjoy dinner with my family.*

I found myself a residential building. I'd already reached the outskirts of the city, and high-rise buildings were now few and far between, unlike the CBD, the central business district. The majority of the

residential buildings were less than ten stories tall, but it didn't mean fewer aberrants compared to downtown. Probably because the black fog had struck at midnight, most people had returned home, so there were actually fewer people in the CBD than in the outskirts of the city.

This was also why my progress was slowing down. I had to be extra cautious every time I moved into a new block of buildings. More often than not, I'd intrude into some aberrant's territory and be forced into combat, and once my special powers dropped past a certain level, I'd be forced to find somewhere to hole up to avoid being found by aberrants. Otherwise, I'd be at a disadvantage instead.

I picked out a shabby-looking residential building that was three stories tall and entered after verifying that it was empty. Then, I selected the master bedroom on the second floor, since two of the walls had windows. This ensured that I had an accessible escape route through the windows at any time. I lay down in the closet and closed the closet doors, but left a gap so I could see what was going on outside.

Although it was just eight or nine in the evening, after gulping down some dry rations and water, I yanked down some clothes dangling over me, rested my head against them, and prepared to sleep. I'd set off for home the moment the sun rose the next day.

Dàgē, Shujun, I miss you guys so much. I'll never be confused anymore—things like past lives and current lives don't matter! It doesn't change the fact that I am Jiang Shuyu. I'm your dìdi and èrgē!

Just as I was about to doze off, I caught a soft murmur of voices and

immediately woke up. It was hardly unusual—I'd already run into people quite a number of times, but I'd been stealthily avoiding them as I had no intention of mingling with them.

Although the city was very dangerous, people always managed to survive. It seemed like the survival rate was even higher than in the suburbs, probably because most people living in cities either lived alone or had very small families. If anything, the most immediate danger at the beginning was people around you turning into aberrants, so it was very easy for entire families to get wiped out in the suburbs, where people lived with their family. In contrast, more people survived the first day in the city, but this was balanced by an equally high mortality rate later on.

After listening for a while, I realized those voices had entered the building. I frowned. I'd checked out this house when I had entered just now, and there was definitely no one living here.

Did they just happen to pick the same resting spot? What a pain!

Honestly speaking, I'd already picked this place and it was late, so I really didn't want to leave on my own volition. But the voices suggested that there were quite a lot of people, so it was probably easier if I just found myself a new place instead.

I opened the closet, and just as I was about to jump out of the window, with one foot even set on the window frame, I heard a yell from below.

Did something happen? I hesitated for a moment before deciding to bail out through the window anyway. I could hardly afford to be a saint

in this day and age.

"Mommy!"

"..." I was holding onto the window frame, and all I had to do was step off. But the owner of the child's voice was probably younger than ten? It was quite something to be able to survive until now, so his mother must have gone through a lot.

Mom...

I gritted my teeth, turned back, and dashed downstairs. I paused outside the stairwell to take in the situation. It was a motley crowd of less than twenty people. There were elderly, young, and women, headed by seven to eight men wielding guns. But the men didn't dare to shoot, probably because they were worried about attracting more aberrants, so they were slamming the aberrants with sticks, clubs, and even vegetable knives.

It was a familiar sight.

Five aberrants had entered the house. They were an unusual shape that was hard to describe, resembling aliens that had the stuffing beat out of them by the main characters in alien movies I'd watched before. One was particularly large, a person and a half tall. None of the vegetable knives could put a scratch on him, and this was the one that everyone was terrified of.

"Take the others upstairs!" one of the men yelled behind him.

"We can't. We still haven't checked upst... Huh?" Another man turned to see me standing there. He froze, his eyes wide in shock. Thankfully, he had a lot of comrades next to him to hold off the aberrant.

I didn't bother talking and drew out a knife. I wove past the crowds and even past the closer aberrants, gunning straight for the largest aberrant at the back. My opponent's hands had mutated into the shape of sickles, and his body was encased by a layer of shell. The shell looked hard to damage, so the aberrant fearlessly swung one scythe at me. But I dodged lightly and slipped the knife into an elbow joint. Freezing energy surged into the knife.

The aberrant had obviously never been attacked by special abilities and didn't know how to react. He even tried to swat away the knife with his other arm, but the knife was buried to the hilt in his joint and was even frozen along its entire length. Hitting the knife made him howl in agony, a bizarre sound similar to the static of a broken radio.

Seeing as he had so kindly opened his mouth, I quickly drew out another knife. First, I grabbed onto his lower jaw. Then, I stabbed the knife into his mouth, even twirling it a few times before yanking it out. Immediately after, I drove it into his eye.

His eyes seemed to be covered by a transparent, hard membrane, as the knife encountered a slight resistance as it stabbed in, accompanied by the soft pop of the surface breaking. However, it wasn't enough to block my attack. The knife still managed to journey through the socket and mush up his brain.

There were still four left. I turned back to look at the remaining

aberrants, debating whether or not I should leave the men to deal with them. This was a good chance for them to gain battle experience, and it gave me a reason not to take the evolution crystals of those four aberrants. But the four aberrants saw the changing tide of battle and fled, giving the men no chance to fight.

The aberrants in the city had evolved much faster than their suburban counterparts. They would flee the moment they saw that they were at a disadvantage, unlike those ones in the suburbs with the fearlessness of the ignorant and would keep coming at you until they were wiped out. My first reaction at seeing them flee was to freeze in surprise, before I remembered it had been the same in my previous life.

I dissected the scythe aberrant with my knife. Although it hadn't reached tier one yet, this aberrant was obviously much stronger than the others, so its crystal should be fairly decent. I couldn't pass up on it.

The silence behind me was almost deafening.

"W-what are you doing?" a man asked shakily. Going by his voice, he was still quite young, probably around the same age as me.

I ignored him, continuing to disembowel the corpse and extract the crystal. I purposely lifted the crystal to give it a look over before tucking it into my pocket. As a precaution, however, I hadn't put it directly into my hip flask.

So, what now?

I frowned, finally electing to turn to look at the crowd. They collectively sucked in a breath before relaxing the next moment.

"He's just a boy?" Everyone was bamboozled and just stared at me blankly.

I looked over all the people with a flat expression, trying to adopt a cold demeanor, and said, "I'm sleeping upstairs. No one is to come up."

I was just watching over these people for one night. That was it. Actually, I should have left after taking the crystal, but there were elderly and young in this crowd. Clearly, this was a collection of a few households which had somehow gotten their hands on guns. None of them really knew how to use the guns, either, so I couldn't bring myself to just abandon them like that.

I stalked past them, planning to head upstairs and avoid interacting with these people.

"Wait, did you use some kind of strange power just now?" someone yelled, the voice marking him as the very same person who had been asking me what I'd been doing a moment ago.

I watched him out of the corner of my eye. As I'd suspected, he looked to be around eighteen or nineteen. He was a bit taller than me and had the tanned skin of an athlete. With his good looks, he looked extremely sunny and easy-going, the type of guy that made a favorable impression on first sight.

But I ignored him. When I reached the stairs, a woman suddenly

rushed forward to block my way, a child clutched in her arms. She begged, "Take my child with you! Please, she's a good girl. She won't disturb you!"

The girl was around seven or eight years old, and she was looking at her mom in fear and confusion. I narrowed my eyes and said coldly, "Only you are willing to protect your own kid."

I didn't mind taking a child upstairs with me, if it were just the one. But there were five or six children of all ages, and even a teenager who was around fifteen or so—did he count as a child as well? If I took all of them with me, I might as well sleep on the first floor. But there was no way I was doing that.

This woman already wants to slap herself for being so stupid as to stay behind. Whyyyyyyy are you acting like Mother Teresa?!

We couldn't absorb these people into our group. There were almost twenty of them, but only seven young men, and this was counting that eighteen year-old Sunny Boy. The women were all the timid type who froze up—the better ones among them were the mothers who would hug their children, but they were still huddled to one side, motionless.

By this stage, even Guan Weijun could wield a stick to bash things, ready to drag away her impulsive boyfriend at any moment.

The more pitiful they are, the more reason I can't take them with me! Best snatch some sleep upstairs, then immediately set off the moment there's daylight.

I wanted to dash upstairs, but the person in my way wouldn't let me go.

"Please," the mother sobbed as tears flowed down her face, "it's too dangerous down here. Please save my daughter, please!"

I clenched my hand into a fist and ordered coldly, "Get lost!"

"How can you be so heartless?" Sunny Boy said angrily, "She's just a little girl. What's the big deal with having her sleep next to you?"

*Because I won't be able to sleep! Because I won't be able to run!
Because...*

I gripped my hands into a fist again and whipped out a knife into a backhand grip, shouting, "Get lost!"

The woman was so terrified that she fled to a corner, clinging onto her daughter all the while.

I climbed the stairs.

Sunny Boy wanted to storm over in rage, but he was grabbed by another woman. The woman looked like she was about to burst into tears, probably his mother going by her age, and for some reason, she looked quite familiar. *Have I met her in my past life? Or is she someone Jiang Shuyu knows?*

"There's so few of us now, and the whole city's full of monsters, but you won't even help out? So what, are you planning to let mankind go

extinct and live by yourself with the monsters?"

The others tried to talk some sense into him. "Chen Yishao, enough already!"

Someone even apologized to me, "Young people are impatient by nature, so please don't take it to heart. Just ignore him and go upstairs if you want to. No one will dare to get in your way again!"

Their words were polite and courteous, but couldn't hide the undercurrents of anxiety and terror. In their eyes, I was probably only slightly better than the aberrants, because at least I wasn't likely to start snacking on them.

I headed upstairs with heavy steps and once again settled in the closet, but sleep wouldn't come. Those people downstairs were all too familiar. In my previous life, I had probably been in the same situation as them, I guess? Except, I had fared somewhat better than those women. With a boyfriend who kept charging headfirst into death, it was impossible not to become a strong woman.

If there had been someone strong who'd been willing to help, like one of the powerhouses... So what? I had still managed to survive ten years in the apocalypse even without the support of a powerhouse. Even if we had had one to rely on, does that necessarily mean that Xia Zhenggu would've remained faithful to me? What's more, that guy always wanted to get stronger. So if we ever got taken under the wing of a powerhouse, he'd keep competing with them with all his might, and if he couldn't beat that person, he'd probably do something drastic and probably worsen the situation.

After sorting things out in my head, I thought I'd be able to sleep, but I still ended up tossing and turning restlessly. I had to admit, I was being soft-hearted. In the past, I hadn't had the ability to even guarantee my own safety, so there was simply no way I could've helped anyone else back then. That meant that I hadn't had to feel responsible for others. But now, even though I was capable enough, I was choosing to turn my back on them. Just thinking about that mother, pleading and begging for her daughter, made my heart sink.

I knew I should've just jumped out of the window... No, wait, if I didn't go downstairs and just left through the window, I might regret it even more.

I felt bad either way—Xiao Qi had been right when she said I had saint-like tendencies.

"Who does this kind of stuff? Not only do you get along with his mistresses, you even help them out?" Xiao Qi demanded huffily, "Tell me, did you give food to those abandoned mistresses again yesterday?"

I responded like it was the most natural thing in the world, "It's because I stopped caring about Xia Zhengu a long time ago. Besides, he's taken in so many women. Won't I get tired if I have to hate every single one of them? Anyway, that was just some leftover food."

Xiao Qi gave me a skeptical look in response.

We really had lots of food, but for some reason, Xiao Qi's expression made me feel a little guilty and I quickly added, "I didn't give anything

to those women who made trouble for me. Just the girls—they're still so young. How can they survive without relying on a powerhouse? Can you really blame them?"

"All right already, what're you getting so worked up for? I'm just worried about you," she replied in a defeated tone of voice. "I mean, I'm an abandoned mistress you helped out, too. I'm hardly in the position to tell you not to help others."

"Don't say that. You've helped me out a lot, too. If it weren't for you, those mistresses would probably have walked all over me many times over..."

Waking from my memories, I realized that Guan Weijun hadn't been utterly uncharitable, either. Back then, once we had found somewhere to settle down, fear of starvation had driven me to start raising this and that, and I had grown all kinds of plants. Because I was able to cultivate lots of edible stuff, I'd been able to retain the "girlfriend" throne. It hadn't amounted to much, though, and I had always been the target of the mistresses' attacks, but at least I would never have been kicked out.

Back then, I'd been Xia Zhengu's girlfriend in name only for quite some time, so I empathized with the mistresses as I watched them being abandoned, one after the other. That was the only reason I'd send them some food to help them out a little every so often.

After spacing out a little in the closet, I made up my mind and headed downstairs. The elderly and the children couldn't stay up anymore and were sleeping together, while the women clung onto their children

tightly, watching the windows and doors in terror. Tension made the men as taut as drawn bows, and every little thing sent them jolting in the air. Even if they did manage to sleep, it was shallow. Every one of them had such dark shadows under their eyes, it was like they'd been punched in the face.

Chen Yishao was the first to notice me, and he warily growled, "What do you want?"

I tipped out a crystal from the hip flask onto my hand and held it out for them to see, and explained without any prompting, "These are evolution crystals. You can dig them out from the aberrants' chests. Eating them will strengthen your body and boost your special powers, and they can even heal injuries."

I looked around at everyone and walked toward Chen Yishao. I held up the crystal in my palm and told him, "Eat it."

Chen Yishao took a few steps back, hesitating somewhat, and he didn't dare to reach out his hand.

I frowned. *Did I pick the wrong person?* I'd originally thought that this youngster was the impulsive type, not to mention most people his age had read a lot of stories, so they were more willing to accept things like special powers and evolution and stuff. So in theory, he should be the most willing to eat the crystal.

As long as there was just one person who took the plunge and didn't die from eating the crystal, most of the others would follow suit. Not to mention I'd demonstrated my capabilities. There was no need to drug

people like them, and more importantly, these crystals were a beacon of hope in these hopeless apocalyptic days of fleeing and hiding.

Chen Yishao continued to waver. I frowned, wondering if I should continue pressuring him or find someone else, but in that moment, a figure dashed forward. I sidestepped, and only when I was sure of who it was did I stop moving. It was a woman, and she was clutching a child. She snatched the crystal with one hand and fed it to her child. As she fed the child, I spotted the redness that had infused the child's cheeks. It was obvious the child was burning with fever, and after eating the crystal, the child didn't show much change. The mother couldn't hold back anymore and burst into tears. A man walked to her side and watched the mother and child mournfully—he was probably her husband.

I stepped forward to check the child's condition—unharmful—and consoled her, "Don't worry. He should be developing his special abilities. Keep giving him more water and food, and he'll recover."

Actually, after experiencing the black fog, the human body had become more resilient, and hardly anyone died from illnesses anymore. If they weren't killed, they'd become infected after getting injured and turn into aberrants. This was particularly the case for children like him—children seemed weak, but in actual fact, their recovery ability was much better than an adult's. After a few years' time, an adult might not even win against a child in a fight—*those will be the days when everything we know will be turned on its head.*

I took out another crystal and held it to the woman's mouth.

She hesitated and turned to look at her husband, saying, "Give it to my husband."

"One per person."

Hearing that, the woman reached out, wanting to take the crystal. But the look on her face gave her away—she was probably going to sneak it to her husband for him to have it.

I moved my hand to the husband's mouth and said coldly, "One per person. Eat it now. But you don't have to eat it if you don't want to."

The husband froze but still didn't dare to take it. I moved my hand away after three seconds. It was only because he was the first person that I'd waited that long—the others would be lucky if they even got a second to decide.

I moved the crystal back to the woman's mouth again. Her eyes widened, but just as I was about to move away, she swallowed the crystal in one gulp, drawing her husband's anxious glare. But he glanced at me and kept his silence.

After that, I offered crystals to every single person. Some ate and some didn't, and unexpectedly, Chen Yishao came up to me himself, asking for one. He gave me a smile with his brilliant, white teeth, and even commented, "I believe you're a good person."

You think I care? I resisted the urge to roll my eyes, maintaining my cold, haughty expression, but still, I handed him a crystal.

After that, some of those who had abstained started to come up to me as well, having seen him ask for a crystal and that the others seemed fine even after eating. But I withdrew my hand and said tonelessly, "No more."

Of course, I still had crystals, and I'd kept the crystal from the largest aberrant just now as well. But I didn't feel like giving out any more. So *what? Bite me.*

Chen Yishao swallowed the crystal, and after a few seconds, he said with suspicion written all over his face, "Doesn't seem like anything's changed."

"One or two crystals won't change much. At most, your body will improve a little. You will need to continue eating them."

Chen Yishao nodded, speaking in a tone of dawning comprehension, "So it's like the skills and levels of characters in games, right? They're only useful once they've leveled up?"

As expected of youngsters, they could even apply games as examples. I nodded and, seeing that he was able to accept this, added, "And like in a game, you need to start getting better crystals the more you eat. In the future, the aberrants will grow stronger as well, and their crystals will improve, too."

I'd intended to give them a tip, but to my surprise, what caught these people's attention was something else, and commotion rippled through the crowd.

"Those monsters will become stronger?"

"Oh god, what has this world come to?"

People started panicking, the men paled in fright, and the women even started weeping.

I watched them, feeling both annoyed and sympathetic. Back when it had all started, I wasn't much better than them. I wanted to just turn and leave them to their fates, but my words had caused the commotion and terror. If I left just like that, I wouldn't be able to look myself in the mirror.

Just when I was about to explain that humans would also become stronger, Chen Yishao spoke up ahead of me, "So we'll become stronger as well?"

I gave a small smile. "As long as you survive, you'll become strong!"

Chen Yishao's eyes lit up—he was much livelier than the others, and when I looked at him, I was reminded of... Xia Zhengu.

He too had reacted in a similar way at the beginning of the apocalypse. Although he wasn't immune to the fear at the changes running through the world, he didn't despair. When he discovered he had special powers, he even started obsessing about getting stronger. If he didn't think it was stupid, he would've probably yelled out stuff like, "I want to be the first person to conquer the world!"

My mood suddenly took the turn for the worse.

"What are those 'special powers' you mentioned?" Chen Yishao asked excitedly.

This guy is Chen Yishao, not Xia Zhengu! I buried those useless memories and held out my hand, palm facing up. An oval, clear marble formed there and started sprouting like it was a seed. The sprouts grew upwards into branches, and finally, formed a transparent, crystal tree that stood about thirty centimeters tall.

"Beautiful," Chen Yishao breathed in admiration.

Everyone's eyes were wide open, most of them in awe but without too much surprise. Quite a few of them had probably discovered their own special abilities but hadn't been able to use them much. At most, they could probably only use them for a mouthful of water or lighting fires; or worse, they were even more useless than a lighter.

I stressed, "Everyone has special powers, and some of them can be all kinds of weird and strange. The harder it is to discover the power, the more useful it is, so don't worry."

The guilt weighing down on my mind lightened significantly once I said those words. These people were far luckier than I had been in my past life. Guan Weijun not only had to train in actual combat while trying to figure out how to use her enhanced vision, she had only discovered the existence of evolution crystals after crushing an aberrant's chest while fighting for her life.

"Oh!" The woman clinging onto her child suddenly exclaimed, "He's

awake! He's awake! My boy's awake!"

I looked at the child. The redness had faded from his cheeks, so as expected, he was fine. Developing special powers had probably taken too much out of him, so he immediately recovered once he had the crystal to boost his health.

But the fact that this special ability drained much stamina meant that it was probably quite a good one.

I was tempted to take the child with me, but both his parents were still present, which meant that I'd have to take the family of three. It was hard to say whether the parents would be willing to leave the group and join a lone wolf like me. On top of that, there were so many people here, so there was no way I was declaring for all to hear about how I had a mercenary troop, weapons, and a basement full of resources.

It's too much of a pain, so forget it!

But if the child could become one of the powerhouses, it would be a good thing for humanity. I took out a few pieces of chocolate from my backpack, broke off a corner, and shoved it into the child's mouth. The remainder was thrown to the man standing next to him, to dispel any mistaken notions he may have about me favoring his wife too much.

Then, I turned on my heel and walked out through the door.

"Wait, where—?"

Chen Yishao's voice called out from behind me, but I didn't stop. I didn't dare to stop, and even if it was a dangerous time of night, I had to go. If I hung around any longer, I'd really turn into Mother Teresa.

It wasn't a big deal, being the saint in my previous life. At most, I'd been backstabbed by my ex-boyfriend, shoved into a bunch of aberrants and turned into a pile of mince. But now, I had a dàgē, a xiaomèi, an uncle, an auntie, and Dàgē's mercenaries. With so many people that mattered, there was no way I could afford to be a saint.

I suddenly spun around and dodged to one side. Almost simultaneously, a gunshot rang out.

I gave that person an icy glare.

"W-why are you shooting?" Chen Yishao stared in utter disbelief at one of the men in his group.

The man held up the gun in both hands, trembling a little. Although he was a little flustered at first, he gritted his teeth and said, "He's got food—look at that big backpack of his. It's probably full of stuff to eat! A-and those crystals, he's gotta still got more. Get him to leave the stuff behind."

Chen Yishao said incredulously, "What are you talking about?"

He was astonished, but not everyone else reacted the same way. Quite a few of them even started acting suspiciously.

When I saw that, I smiled. And when they saw my smile, everyone

showed dazed looks of amazement, regardless of gender. Jiang Shuyu's face was forever awesome. Even though I'd been parading all this time with a haughty, cold expression, it couldn't even hold a candle to the power of a smile.

"You can't win against an aberrant, but you dare to raise a hand against me. Don't tell me you've already forgotten who killed that aberrant?"

You guys can't even handle aberrants, but you have the guts to kill your own kind?! As expected, I really can't afford to be a saint. If I'd taken these people back, they'd definitely make trouble for the mercenary troop, and I'll never be able to forgive myself!

The shooter's expression suddenly became ruthless, and his hand stopped shaking. I watched him quietly. He obviously hadn't reached the stage where his morals were completely gone, and he still wore an expression of guilt and agony. But none of this stopped him from shooting at me.

I clenched my right hand, and the originally empty palm was now wrapped around the hilt of a small ice knife. Then, I flung my hand. The knife flew straight and true, stabbing right into his heart. His eyes bulged, and he lowered his head, seeming to want to see what it was, but that motion turned into a full collapse.

No one knew how to react. If anything, they seemed puzzled as to why this person had suddenly fallen over.

"Don't scream," I warned them in a bland tone of voice. "That guy's

gunshot was pretty loud. If you guys start screaming on top of it, then you'll really draw the aberrants' attention, and you'll be dead meat."

That Chen Yishao knelt down and tapped at the guy. When he realized something was wrong, he flipped him over and was stunned by the sight of the small cylinder of ice protruding from his chest. Although I described these impromptu ice knives as "knives," they weren't much more than ice shards that were vaguely knife-shaped, with the hilt being thicker than the blade so I had somewhere I could hold it. It wasn't like I was planning on displaying them at an ice sculpture exhibition.

Everyone sucked in sharp breaths when they saw it, but thankfully, no one screamed. We were four months into the apocalypse, so people were no longer strangers to death.

Shocked, Chen Yishao looked up at me in confusion and asked in bewilderment, "W-why'd you go and kill him?"

Because he wanted to kill me! Isn't that obvious enough?

"In the future, you'll thank me for killing him."

This man was willing to kill me for food, so you think he won't kill others as well? How many he would actually manage to kill was anyone's guess, but people like him somehow always managed to survive while stepping on others' corpses. The apocalypse is always full of backstabbers like him, so the fewer the better!

"Never!" Chen Yishao glared at me.

This kid really has the Mother Teresa-like qualities of my previous life. Oh, wait, he's a guy. What should I call him? Father Terence? Unfortunately, the people who died the quickest in the apocalypse were the saints. Guan Weijun's luck had been pretty incredible for her to last out ten years in the apocalypse.

I couldn't be bothered to wrangle with him any longer. I was already standing at the door anyway, so I just turned and left.

"Stop!" Chen Yishao was so frantic that he was almost hopping on the spot. "You're planning to just run after killing someone?"

I looked back and rolled my eyes at him. "Then, report me to the police."

After that, I left this group of people without a shred of hesitation. Thanks to that one gunshot, my unneeded heart of a saint had been shattered to pieces. I could finally get out of there without feeling a shred of guilt. I'd go home and whine about it to my dàgē and xiaomèi, and I might even get a comforting pat on my head!

I'm going home!

Chapter #7: Dàgē, Dàgē

Traveling at night really was much more taxing than during the day. Along the way, I once again started accumulating a ton of evolution crystals, to the point where I had almost made up for the crystals that had been spent on that group.

I rushed onwards the entire night, and en route, I kept having to pause to fight or zig-zag quickly through streets in order to throw off large groups of aberrants who were on my tail. It really was dead tiring, but at least I made good progress. I'd originally estimated that I'd arrive home in the evening, but it wasn't even ten in the morning when I caught sight of the district where our home was located.

The exhaustion, however, was nothing in comparison to my longing for my family. If anything, my pace picked up when I saw our district. Starving as I was, not having had breakfast, I still didn't bother to stop for a bite. The faster I reached home, the sooner Shujun could prepare breakfast for me. *No one likes rations! Even if those rations were prepared by Jin Feng, they can't compete with Shujun's home cooked meals!*

I passed through a few more streets, so excited that I was practically skipping every step of the way. Then, finally, I spotted some familiar road signs. I just had to go two more steps, look left, and I'd be home sweet home!

One step, two steps, look left!

A cluster of huge ice crystals stood not far away, right where the

house had once stood.

My mind blanked out, while my feet automatically broke out into a frantic sprint.

My home's gone! Completely gone!

Where's Dàgē?

Shujun?

Uncle and Auntie?

I sprinted to the front gates. The outer walls were undamaged, but the only thing left of the house inside those walls was rubble. There was even a huge cluster of ice crystals standing in the middle of the ruins. *What the hell? I don't understand. Did these crystals fall from the sky and crush the house?*

If this was ten years into the apocalypse, I'd understand. A very powerful ice user would be able to pull this off, but this was just the fourth month into the apocalypse! Even a tier-one user like me had no way of crafting such large crystals, much less smashing the house into smithereens. *Just what tier do you have to be to create something of this scale?*

"Dàgē?" I couldn't help but yell at the top of my voice, completely ignoring any potential enemies lurking around.

"Shujun!"

"Uncle? Auntie?"

There was no reply at all.

I walked into the walled enclosure, my footsteps dragging this time, and painfully forced myself to look around. I was terrified I'd see something I wouldn't be able to accept. But aside from the ruins of the house, I didn't see anything. I breathed a sigh of relief, then steeled myself and advanced toward the crystals.

*These crystals are so huge that any one of them can brain someone...
No, no, no! What am I saying?!*

I circled once around the ice crystals but didn't see anyone. Not even a single speck of blood was to be found. This was beginning to feel a bit strange. It was like the house was empty.

So it just happens that no one was at home when the ice crystals came smashing down, and the house became so unlivable that Dàgē and the others moved out?

No, that's impossible. Even if Dàgē and the others moved, they'd stay nearby. After all, I haven't returned home, so there's no way they would abandon me.

As I pondered the matter with a frown, I scaled up the ice crystal. Just now, while examining the base of the ice crystals, I could tell there was a fairly large space in the middle of the crystals, so I figured I should get up there and see what was inside.

The crystals were both freezing and slippery, making it hell to climb. Thankfully, I was an ice ability user, but even so, my hands were so cold that they were fast becoming numb. *Just how powerful does the ice user have to be in order to do this? How's it even possible?*

After an arduous climb to the top, I looked down and...

"Dàgē?"

The person lying in the middle of the ice crystals was none other than Dàgē. He was quietly lying on the ice, eyes shut and showing no reaction whatsoever.

"Dàgē, are you okay?"

Still no reaction!

I hastily slid down along the slope of the ice crystals. Ignoring the pain as my kneecaps smacked hard against the ice at the bottom, I turned my momentum into a roll before scrambling toward Dàgē on my hands and knees. Then, I knelt next to him, not knowing what to do.

"Dàgē? Dàgē?"

I called out again and again, but I didn't dare to reach out to see if... he was still breathing.

It was so cold that my entire body was frozen stiff, and even my heart felt like it was turning to ice. I'd probably die if I stayed here any

longer, and this was coming from an ice user!

My eyes stung with heat.

What happened? Dàgē, how can you collapse? How's it possible? Jin Xiaoyue said you were meant to be the Ice Emperor! You would've become the Ice Emperor, but because I called you back, your ice ability turned into healing, and now you're lying here...

The stinging heat never managed to spill down my face, turning into frost instead. I lifted a hand to rub my eyes. I couldn't afford to turn into an ice sculpture. I still hadn't found Shujun, Uncle, and Auntie. After rubbing my eyes, I lowered my hand, planning to check whether Dàgē was breathing.

Instead, I saw him staring at me.

My mouth fell open. A surge of relief came over me.

Dàgē's opened his eyes, and he's looking at me!

"Dà..."

He suddenly snapped a hand around my neck and squeezed. Instantly, an unbelievable amount of ice energy starting pouring into my neck. Even as an ice ability user, I couldn't hold up against the onslaught of energy, and even the air in my lungs started freezing over. The agony of suffocation immediately swept over me and, not wanting to be killed by Dàgē's own hands, I frantically kicked at him.

But he caught my leg easily with his other hand, and again, I was assaulted by another wave of ice energy, the biting cold so terrible that I wanted to scream. But my frozen throat could no longer produce any sounds.

Dàgē, do you want to kill me? Why? Do you really... want to strangle me to death?

Dàgē gazed at me, his face filled with fury, but slowly the anger receded to be replaced by confusion. Suddenly, a look of shock flashed across his face and he asked, not quite daring to believe himself,

"Shuyu?"

I'd long lost any strength to respond.

He looked at his own hand and quickly let go of my throat. Warm air rushed into my frozen throat, and for some time, I could do nothing but curl up and cough non-stop. As I did that, Dàgē patted my back, panicking.

"Shuyu, is it really you?" He paused and asked again, at an utter loss, "Is it you?"

No shit, Sherlock. Who am I, Shujun?

Finally, once my throat felt a bit better, I lifted my head. Dàgē was staring at my face in a daze, looking like he hadn't seen how handsome his dìdi was in eight hundred years.

"Shuyu?!" he repeated again in a shout, looking dumbfounded.

Dàgē, what the hell? First, you strangle someone until they lose their voice, then you keep yelling at them for a response. I rolled my eyes, rasping a "yeah."

Dàgē reached out, and I scuttled backwards in alarm, my hands wrapped protectively around my throat. *Don't come strangling me again. My throat's gonna freeze for real!*

He froze, not seeming to understand why I was avoiding him. His face even lit up with rage for a moment. But then his gaze shifted to my hands that were protecting my throat, and the rage once again turned into guilt.

Dàgē withdrew his hand and kept his distance. He just frowned, thinking for a moment, then suddenly asked, "Shuyu, who am I to you?"

...Did this Dàgē get so cold his brain stopped working or something?

"Dàgē." I was extremely troubled. *Dàgē can't have lost his memories too, right? No way. He called me Shuyu, so he knows who I am.*

"What's our dìdi called?"

Holy shit, Dàgē's really lost it? He's turned Shujun from a girl into a boy!

When I didn't respond immediately, Dàgē growled, "Answer me!"

Sensing the extreme drop in temperature, I had no choice but to respond hoarsely, "We only have a mèimei, called Jiang Shujun."

"What do you normally call her?"

"Junjun."

He's asking these questions to check my identity? Did someone pretend to be me?

Dàgē halted his line of questioning and just stared at me. I really didn't know how to describe the expression he was wearing. It was like he'd lost his whole world, only to rediscover it again. He relaxed completely, and tears even started brimming in his eyes, shocking me so much that my mind went blank. But before I could snap out of my daze, Dàgē had leapt forward and hugged me tightly to his chest, so tightly that my injured throat started aching.

From above me came the choked words, "Thank god, I thought I was too late and I wouldn't make it in time again, and I would fail to save you and Shujun again..."

He suddenly stopped, then pushed me back a little and asked hastily, "Where's Shujun?"

"Isn't Shujun with you?" I was becoming more and more confused.
What's with Dàgē? There's something seriously wrong with him. Don't tell me a psyche-type aberrant's messing with him again?

Dàgē mumbled in a daze, "Shujun's with me?"

"Dàgē, where's Shujun? And the others?"

I was really becoming very worried. After I discovered Dàgē was still alive, I didn't think I needed to worry about Shujun. With Dàgē's overprotectiveness, he'd definitely die before and not after Shujun would. So as long as Dàgē was still breathing, Shujun had to be alive and well. But there was something severely wrong with the current situation.

Dàgē frowned, asking, "Shuyu, which year of the apocalypse is it?"

I blinked before replying, "It's just four months into the apocalypse. How'd you come up with 'which year'? Dàgē, what's the matter with you?"

"Four months?" he mumbled, baffling me completely. Then, he said with a frown, "So Shuyu, you didn't turn into an aberrant right at the very start? But that's not right, I should still be in Oceania at this point in time. Why are you saying that Shujun's with me?"

W-who turned into an aberrant? And... Oceania?

I stared at him speechlessly, suddenly realizing that there were white streaks in his hair. Although he hadn't changed much in terms of looks, his hair had grown much longer. It hadn't even been ten days since I was snatched away by the bird, so it was impossible for Dàgē's hair to grow this long!

It was Dàgē but not Dàgē at the same time. He had ice powers, and

he had been in "Oceania"—*no way, he's the Ice Emperor, Jiang Shutian?!*

Holy shit! Is this really possible—why not?

I'd not only changed over worlds but also changed into a whole new body, transforming from Guan Weijun into Jiang Shuyu. In contrast, Ice Emperor Jiang Shutian was the real deal in his original packaging! He'd only crossed over into a different world, a way simpler situation than mine! So far, I had yet to figure out whether I'd crossed over into a new universe, reincarnated, or simply had mental issues.

As I stood there, my mind blown by the shock, Dàgē suddenly sat heavily on the ground. The surrounding ice crystals started falling apart and melting, which was good, because I was freezing my butt off. But without the ice cluster, the ruined house showed signs of collapsing. I had a very bad feeling when cracking and splintering sounds came from below my feet, but it was too late.

The ice ground completely disintegrated, sending the two of us plummeting into the basement.

I was already injured in my throat and foot, and this was now followed by a pummeling from the falling ice pieces. I fell and landed in such a terrible position that the only way I could've been worse off was if I had face-planted into the floor. As I lay there on the floor, crushed by the weight of countless pieces of ice, I wanted to beat up Dàgē.

Thankfully, the ice melted very quickly, leaving me drenched from head to toe in ice melt. I even took a few gulps of the water to slake

my thirst.

That said, I wasn't cold. Or rather, what had made me freeze earlier wasn't the ice but the ice energy, and Dàgē no longer emitted so much ice energy. *He'd probably dialed it back because he saw his dìdi was about to turn into an icicle?*

Pushing aside the remaining ice pieces, I croaked, "Dàgē?"

He was lying on the floor, motionless. I quickly scrambled over and was on the verge of checking whether he was breathing, but thankfully, Dàgē opened his eyes in time to stop freaking out his dìdi.

"Dàgē, are you okay?"

He shook his head, looking at me apologetically as he said, "Shuyu, I'm sorry. In order to go back to the past, I had to use too much energy and couldn't control it too well."

"Go back to the past"? I see. Even if it's the Ice Emperor, he wouldn't have been so powerful at this stage of the apocalypse. He must've already lived in the apocalypse for quite a few years, so he's not only switched worlds, but also gone back in time.

He said uncomfortably, "Shuyu, I'm from the world ten years into the future. I'm not your current Dàgē."

No, your Majesty, Ice Emperor, you've completely gone into the wrong world. My Dàgē's already turned into a healer, so even ten years from now, he won't turn into a master of ice!

"I found an... ability user with power over time, and forced him to send me back. But I never imagined that the process would be so difficult. I had to use up all my energy to avoid being torn to pieces." Here, he looked at me again and asked, "Do you believe me, Shuyu?"

"I do." I nodded, saying, "Dàgē's hair wasn't so long."

He gave a laugh and said sorrowfully, "I've already forgotten how long it was back then. I've even forgotten that you look even better than you did in my memories."

I blinked. *So this means he hasn't seen "Jiang Shuyu" for a very long time? Then what on earth happened to the original Jiang Shuyu? Wait, didn't Dàgē just say something like "Shuyu, you didn't turn into an aberrant right at the very start"?*

Could it be the original world's Jiang Shuyu had turned into an aberrant right at the start of the apocalypse?

I was a bit shocked, but the more I thought about it, the more it made sense. If that world's Jiang Shuyu had been knocked out by the falling tile and hadn't woken up, it wasn't strange if what woke up after the descent of the black fog was already an aberrant.

Dàgē suddenly grabbed my hand, promising, "Shuyu, don't worry. This time, Dàgē will definitely protect you two!"

I nodded. Dàgē had already always been protecting me and Shujun. *But Dàgē, the you in this world isn't in Oceania but in Asia. Oh, wait, I*

mean Meisia. Habit is hard to change.

What do I do with two Dàgēs... Eh? Hang on a sec, isn't it good to have another Dàgē?

And this Dàgē is even the Ice Emperor from ten years in the future!

Holy shit, the Ice Emperor from ten years later has now appeared in year one of the apocalypse! I was stunned by this revelation. W-we can just go directly conquer the world now! Humanity can flourish in the apocalypse too!

I was so moved by this that I snatched up Dàgē's hand. I had everything figured out now. The more Dàgēs the merrier. Forget two, I'd be even happier if you gave me eight or ten Dàgēs.

I wanted to explain about this world's Dàgē, for example, his current location, so Dàgē could have some mental preparation, but... Wait, this Dàgē's also a Dàgē too. I'm starting to confuse even myself. Anyway, let the Ice Emperor know that we'll be seeing his other self, then take him to find the others, then we'll team up and go conquer the world!

But talks about the future could wait. The surroundings weren't conducive for conversation. The ice melt was filling the entire basement, and the water had already reached my waist. If this continued, the basement was going to turn into a swimming pool. Let's get out of here first.

Wait! The basement should be stuffed with resources, so how's it turning into a swimming pool?

I finally noticed that the basement was empty. There was no sign of supplies to be seen anywhere, save for a few lonely boxes here and there. I couldn't tell if they had anything in them. On the wall were a few lines of text, but because of the cracks and damage to the wall, many of the words were missing.

XXyu, wX XXX XXX looking for you. Xf you come back XX yourself, XXXX east XXXX XX XXX first go to Luo'an City. If XX XXXXX find XXX you, XXXX district XXX next stop at tower's XXX.

Despite the many gaps in the message, I could still guess the overall meaning. Fortunately, the keywords were all there; otherwise, I'd really cry in despair. It was impossible to pick up a phone in the current world and call them to ask where they were.

I see, so Dàgē and the others went to find me, and they even abandoned the base in their search for me. Given the circumstances, it was extremely likely that I would have already met my end in that bird's stomach. If not for Jin Feng and her gang shooting down that bird, I'd be dead by now.

In order to find his dìdi who in all likelihood had been devoured by the bird, he had abandoned the security of the base and charged in the direction where the bird had gone. He was dragging a whole bunch of people to their collective doom. *Mercenaries, you guys shouldn't follow your boss so blindly, okay? Try and dissuade him from this suicide run?*

I really wanted to yell at them for being a bunch of idiots, but the

warm feeling in my chest said otherwise.

Even if all the bad luck in the Jiang family was concentrated in me, I'd still accept this life.

A hand settled on my chest. *What now, Ice Emperor?* I looked up nervously, but instead of the craziness I'd expected, I saw a face that was frighteningly pale. There wasn't a trace of color in his face.

"Dàgē?"

He sent me flying with one push, a gentle motion that didn't hurt. I sailed upwards, out of the hole that was the basement, and landed on the surface on my backside. Before I could figure out what was going on, an astonishing sight unfolded before my eyes.

A huge rush of cold air exploded from the sunken pit. It was ice energy, so powerful that the water vapor in the air froze. The surroundings fogged over with white mist, and a film of frost formed over every surface. It was like standing on a snowy mountain.

It was so cold I couldn't feel my nose anymore. To avoid losing a nose or an ear the next second, I had no choice but to drag my injured leg and move away from the pit. In any case, this power came from the Ice Emperor himself, so it shouldn't hurt him.

As it turned out, moving away was the right decision. I had barely made it to the outer walls when it happened. The surrounding white mist began to spiral into the pit, the vortex slowly transforming into an ice tornado that reached up endlessly into the sky...

I stared, stupefied. I didn't know what was going on or what to do. What was more, I didn't dare to get any closer. The energies were terrifying. Even standing at the outer walls, my nose felt like it was about to fall off at any moment. But I couldn't bring myself to move further away. If anything happened, I would rush in and help... *And what, help the Ice Emperor?*

Ahem, it's so cold that my brain has stopped working.

After standing for a while, I really was starting to turn into an icicle. Just as I was about to throw in the towel and beat a retreat, the ice tornado drained away into the pit of the basement in the blink of an eye, like it had been sucked up through a straw. Then, a calm settled over everything, as though nothing had ever happened. A calm so great that even the house had disappeared like it had never existed.

My heart suddenly squeezed. A good home had vanished, just like that. It was true that we'd eventually have had to leave; after all, there wasn't much potential for growth in the suburbs, so we could hardly settle here. But I'd never imagined that our departure would be so abrupt, or that we wouldn't even have a single brick left of our house. That terrible tornado of ice energy left only dust in its wake.

Thankfully, we'd only lost the house. Everyone was still alive, so there was nothing worth mourning.

I limped forward. I *had* to check on the Ice Emperor's condition. This happening to him so suddenly was bad news. Battling his way physically across time and space must have taken a lot out of him.

I walked to the lip of the pit and first carefully inspected my surroundings. One lone bolt of ice energy from the Ice Emperor was probably enough to turn me into dust.

When nothing happened, I braced myself and looked down the pit. A roundish crystal stood there, but the Ice Emperor was nowhere to be seen.

"Dàgē?" I called out but no one responded, so I jumped down.

This thing looks like it's... an egg?

I must've made some very strange expressions as I stood there. At first, I'd thought that I could come home to happily complain to Dàgē and then enjoy Shujun's meals. Instead, I'd discovered that the house had been ventilated by ice crystals, scaring the wits out of me, but as it turned out, no one was home. Then, just when I'd thought I'd managed to find Dàgē, he had ended up being a Dàgē from another world. And as I was luxuriating in the fact that one Dàgē wasn't enough while two Dàgē was just perfect, and was happily plotting to conquer the world, something immediately happened to the Ice Emperor.

And now, Ice Emperor Dàgē is an egg.

Is it normal for life to be so unpredictable?

I poked at the egg experimentally. It was a bit cold but nothing happened. Not knowing what to do, I started to eat my food. I really

was famished, and besides, I could watch to see if anything happened while eating. In any case, I didn't know what was going on, so I didn't want to do anything rash. Not to mention, the Ice Emperor was way above my level. He only had to flick a finger to kill someone, so he was definitely not someone I would want to experiment on.

If nothing happened, then I'd have to find a vehicle to transport the egg. Just the thought of having to travel with an egg that was half as tall as a person was enough to give me a headache! Thankfully, just when I was finishing off my meal, the egg started to rock.

I stared blankly as cracks appeared on the surface of the ice egg. Realization started to dawn that maybe I should get out. *If another ice tornado comes whipping out...*

Shit! I've got to get out!

Just as I was about to rush out of the pit, the egg exploded. I instantly leapt and scrambled my way up, literally shooting out of the pit. I didn't even dare to pause and grab my backpack that had been by my side. I was terrified that a moment's delay would doom me to the same fate as the house, and I'd become a pile of dust.

Once again, I sprinted for the outer wall, prepared for explosions, tornados or earthquakes to strike at any moment. I spent a good ten minutes there, heart pounding. But when nothing happened and my worries about the Ice Emperor trumped my fears, I couldn't resist running back to check on him.

I looked down into the pit. The ice egg was already gone, leaving

behind scattered bits of ice. But more importantly, there was someone looking up at me from below.

I goggled. *He... he...*

"Mommy?" came the high pitched voice of a child.

...No, it's your dīdi.

I stared at him. He stared back up at me with wide eyes and, suddenly, I felt guilty. Leaving a child in a pit had to be child abuse.

But is he really a child?

I hopped down into the pit. I didn't dare touch the child and just looked him up and down from around two paces away. The child was covered in clothing too big for him. If anything, he was almost drowning in the pile of clothes and couldn't move. And the clothes were the Ice Emperor's.

Adding on the fact that his face was a chibi version of Dàgē's, there was no denying the reality before my eyes.

"W-what do you remember?" I asked cautiously. *Even if this child's super adorable, he's still the Ice Emperor. Control your hands! Don't pinch his cheeks or ruffle his hair!*

The little Ice Emperor stared at me uncomprehendingly and replied, "I remember you, Mommy."

*Like hell I'm your mother! You've even gotten the genders mixed up!
You don't remember anything, do you!*

My future Dàgē had turned into an egg, and the egg had turned into a three-year old child. These changes were crazy! And even crazier was the fact that this child's ice energy was even lower than mine.

My expression darkened. *How did humanity's flourishing future in the apocalypse vanish again? Ice Emperor, whatever happened to protecting me and Shujun?*

Clinging onto a shred of hope, I asked, "But you remember your name, right?"

The child looked down, pondering. Just as I thought that not all hope was lost for humanity, he lifted his head, asking me in return, "Mommy, what's my name?"

"Call me Dìdi. No, wait, call me Gēge!" The idea of a three-year old calling me "Dìdi" was just downright weird, but being called "Mommy" was even weirder! So in comparison, being called "Gēge" was much better.

The child tilted his head, not quite understanding, and he just asked insistently, "Mommy, my name."

"Your name is Jiang Shu..." I frowned. Using "Jiang Shutian" was a bad idea because it was too easy to mix the two of them up. Once I found my real Dàgē, how was I going to address them if they both had the same name? So I changed my mind mid-sentence. "You're Jiang

Xiaotian!"

"Okay, I'm Jiang Xiaotian." Xiaotian nodded with a glowing smile. I really wanted to tweak his tender cheeks!

So even someone as mighty as Dàgē was still an adorable doll when he was three. It was really hard to imagine that he would turn into the mighty, buff, and heroic Dàgē a few years down the line. Unbelievable.

I finally couldn't resist, and I pinched those rosy cheeks of Xiaotian's. *I really pinched them! Dàgē's cheeks! Ice Emperor Jiang Shutian's cheeks!!!!*

"Mommy, I'm hungry." The child looked up at me, and I became awash with guilt.

I let my son become hungry. What a terrible mother I—waaaaaaait, I don't have any sons! No wait, wait, wait, I'm a guy, and just eighteen! Why's this child calling me Mommy? Don't tell me that he's imprinted on me because he hatched from an egg?

"Mommy, I'm so hungry!" Jiang Xiaotian butted his head against my waist with a reproachful look. This also happened to be the only movement he could make since he was trapped by the clothes wrapped around him.

Whatever, it's just something he calls me. I better get the child out and feed him something first.

I fished the child out of the pile of clothes, leaving only the vest for

him to wear as a robe. Then, I started preparing food for him.

After eating meat and crackers, and having a drink, Xiaotian wiped his mouth and said, "Mommy, I'm still hungry." I took out some cookies, but Xiaotian shook his head. "I don't want those."

"Don't be picky in this day and age!" I said huffily, "I'm so sorry that I can't find McDonalds so you can eat junk food."

Xiaotian pointed at my waist where the hipflask hung, the one that contained evolution crystals.

I have a feeling that this child's going to be hard to raise.

I silently took out one crystal, and Xiaotian swallowed it in one gulp. Then, he reached out for the hipflask and tipped the whole thing into his mouth.

You think these are chocolate candies? My heart ached at the sight, and I had the sudden impulse to grab the child and give him a good spanking. But when I saw him swallowing ravenously, I suddenly remembered what the Ice Emperor had said: *"I used up all my energy to avoid being torn to shreds when I was travelling through space and time,"* and I kept my silence.

He was greedily grabbing for these crystals that weren't even tier one, and he'd even transformed into an amnesiac child, so there was no way he had gotten stronger. *Just how low have the Ice Emperor's energy levels fallen to?*

I quietly watched Xiaotian finish off all the crystals, then asked, "Xiaotian, are you full yet?"

Jiang Xiaotian patted his tummy, looking a little puzzled, then shook his head.

"No worries, I'll go hunt for some crystals for you to eat."

The moment I finished speaking, I frowned. To me, these tierless crystals could only be used for healing, so to the Ice Emperor, they probably really were on the same level as chocolate candies. But even tier one crystals probably weren't much help either.

But no matter what, I had to think of a way of feeding this tiny little Dàgē.

He had thirsted to save his younger siblings, to the point where he had even come up with such an unreliable method as going back to the past. I could only sigh hopelessly at Dàgē's persistence.

I scooped up Jiang Xiaotian into my arms. Even if he couldn't turn back into the Ice Emperor, I'd just raise him as my dìdi. There was nothing to lose from changing from a trio of siblings to a quartet.

Xiaotian happily squirmed in my embrace, shrilling non-stop, "Mommy, Mommy!" Another headache came on. *It's not so bad if you call me "Daddy," but what's with this whole "Mommy" business? Dàgē, were you really that blind when you were little?*

"Call me Gēge!" Xiaotian looked at me blankly. Then, I compromised

and pleaded, "Or at least call me Daddy."

"Mommy, are you hungry?" Jiang Xiaotian asked me in all seriousness.
"You look different from Daddy. Xiaotian wouldn't mix you up."

You do have it mixed... Wait, I think I really do look like Mom?

Thinking back to the full family portrait I had seen, Dàgē and Father looked like they were cast from the same mold, while Shujun and I both resembled Mother, save for the straight nose that was like Dad's.

No wonder. The three year-old Jiang Xiaotian didn't have any concept of having younger siblings. At that time, Shuyu and Shujun were probably some unborn spirits floating in the ether, so he only had Daddy and Mommy. And I looked like Mommy, so I naturally became the mother.

Oh well, what's the point in fighting with a three year-old? At most, once I find Dàgē and Shujun, I'll pass on the title of "Mommy" to Shujun. She's definitely more motherly than me.

Hugging onto Jiang Shutian, I thought back to the message that Dàgē and the others had left.

East, Luo'an City.

Chapter #8: The Many Tales of the Town

As I drove, I kept turning to look at the passenger seat. A three year-old kid was wearing a seat belt, head slumped to one side in slumber and lips in a slight pout. He was super adorable. It was hard to believe that this was Dàgē, *the* Dàgē who had become the Ice Emperor!

Enough! Even though on the inside, I was a thirty five year-old woman who had never had kids before, it was no excuse to gawk at the child all the time. I needed to find a map, not play around with children!

Jin Feng had given me a map of Zhongguan City and the surrounding suburbs, but what I needed was a map of a wider region. Otherwise, if I could drive to Luo'an City just by knowing that it was in the east, I'd start suspecting whether I was actually a GPS instead.

Originally, Dàgē had probably left some maps behind. The basement hadn't been completely empty. There had been a few boxes left there, with supplies probably meant for me. Unfortunately, the ice tornado had been brutal and had wiped the whole house off the map, to say nothing of what it could do to a few boxes. There wasn't even a speck of dust left of them.

So my current mission is to locate a map and food. I glanced again at Xiaotian. And hunt for crystals to feed the child, too.

I'd already reached the edge of the map, so I didn't know which road to take anymore. My only option was to continue heading east. However, this was risky, not to mention the skies were darkening. We were better off looking for somewhere to stay the night.

Soon, I saw a sign pointing to a "Fuli Town." After a moment's thought, I decided to head over for a look. Towns were quite good resting stops because they were safer than cities, but they were also guaranteed to have aberrants that I could hunt for crystals. Further, they'd have some supplies as well as the map that I wanted.

Suddenly, a dark silhouette flashed by in front of me. I frowned, already realizing that it was a woman holding onto a child.

I spun the wheel to one side, bashing aside an abandoned car in the next lane. Then, I drove around it and headed off, throwing a quick glance at the rearview mirror afterwards.

The woman behind us was absolutely furious, yelling and swearing so loudly that I could still hear her from a distance. But then a few others rushed out to slap her, before glaring angrily after me.

Hmph, do you think I'm an idiot? That distance was perfectly calculated, close enough that I can see it's a woman and a kid, but far enough that I can brake in time and not really crash into them. If there aren't people lying in ambush, waiting to rob us the moment I stopped the car, my name isn't Jiang Shuyu!

"Mommy?"

I looked over at the seat next to me. Jiang Xiaotian was rubbing his eyes, looking confused. My abrupt yanking on the steering wheel had woken him up, but he didn't cry or look scared. Even though he had lost his memory and shrank in size, the Ice Emperor really wasn't your

ordinary kid. This was great! After all, bringing a three year-old child along for a ride in the apocalypse really was no joke. The moment a child starts wailing, shit hits the fan, and the apocalypse has no lack of things that could scare a child to tears.

"We'll be stopping soon. Are you hungry?"

Jiang Xiaotian hesitated, looking at the hipflask, and said, "Yes."

You've probably been hungry all this time, right? Cold sweat beaded on my forehead. There was no way I could fill this child's belly. This was just the start of the apocalypse, so I had to risk my life to get even a tier one crystal. But even tier one crystals would probably do no more than take the edge off his hunger.

"I'll get you something to eat soon."

After driving a while, I saw a sign declaring "Welcome to Fuli Town." We had arrived.

I stopped the car haphazardly by the roadside, leaving the keys in the ignition and the doors unlocked. I shouldered my backpack, scooped up Jiang Xiaotian, then made my hasty exit.

This car was one we had randomly taken from the streets. There were plenty of cars to go around, but gas was in short supply, and this car's gas was almost used up, making it worthless. Besides, all the roads in the town were filled with cars, so we couldn't drive in. When it was time to go, we'd just drive away in one of the cars parked on the outskirts of town.

The town's architecture lent it a sense of antiquity. All the buildings were just a few stories high, the only exceptions being the dozen or so taller buildings in the distance forming what was probably the town center.

This place had probably been a popular tourist spot, judging from the multitude of carts gathered by the roadside. Perhaps it had been a historical street of some sort. In the past, I'd loved visiting these sights. I missed it quite a lot, but unfortunately, I hadn't gone back to an earlier time; otherwise, I could relive the times before the apocalypse.

Instead, I'd come back just three days before the apocalypse and had only realized that the apocalypse was coming on the second day. I'd almost run out of time to stock up on supplies, so there was no way I could have found time to enjoy the good old times. Even when I had gone to the supermarket to buy up supplies, my brain was full of thoughts of how the apocalypse was coming once again and whether or not I should just die beforehand and spare myself the pain. Hardly the mood for reminiscing about the days before the apocalypse.

As we walked, I searched for any tracks or traces. Dàgē and the others were heading in the same direction as I was, so if they had come by this town, they must have taken this route as well.

Unfortunately, I didn't find anything useful. The road was clogged up with vehicles, and there was no sign of any of them having been moved. A lot of car windows had been smashed open and the luggage compartments pried open, but the carnage looked like it'd been done

quite some time ago.

Suddenly, I heard a soft crunching. I spun on my heel, to see two rats nibbling something by the gutter running along the street. It was narrow, long, and white in color—*maybe a bone?*

Corpses both inside and outside the cars filled the air with the smell of rot and decay. It stank, but thankfully not too strongly. Currently, corpses were very popular and human corpses would be stripped to the bones. In fact, some aberrants would gobble up the bones as well. A hungry aberrant would eat anything, even other aberrants' corpses.

So what had been left to rot was mostly blood, as well as the scraps of flesh and sinew that were stuck to the skeletons.

I glanced at Xiaotian who was sitting in my arms. As expected, he wasn't afraid, gazing at the scene like it was the most ordinary thing in the world. For someone who'd lived in the apocalypse for over ten years, this was indeed a common sight. Although later on, the colonized cities and towns would no longer look like this, there would still remain many desolate and empty places.

The problem of overpopulation had been terminally resolved, and if anything, the population density had become so thin that you could take over a few hundred *mu*² of wasteland for farming and no one would care. That was assuming you weren't worried about the possibility of being eaten by, rather than eating, the rice you grew.

High property prices also stopped being an issue. You could keep changing to whichever building or house you wanted to live in

everyday, for 365 days a year. Even so, every era had its “expensive” neighborhood. Property prices at the center of large colonies were dead expensive. You had to swap a huge bunch of crystals for a place there, and it could become a very “deadly” affair trying to get one.

As I gazed at those two rats, they in turn stopped eating to stare over back at me as well. Although they were about the size of small poodles, they hadn't mutated too much, so they weren't aberrants. Plants' and animals' natural instincts meant that they wouldn't really attack humans without being provoked in the first two years of the apocalypse, unless they were large, wild carnivores.

I walked away quietly. Although the rats were edible, I didn't really want to eat things like that yet.

As I strolled below the balconies, I could see that many of the windows and doors had been destroyed. I picked a house and entered it. Then, I set Xiaotian down and crafted a small ice knife in my hand as a precaution, before walking a circuit around the first floor. Unfortunately, I didn't find anything, so we moved on to the next one.

“Come, Xiaotian.” I lifted Jiang Xiaotian's hand, only to discover that he was staring fixedly at the ice knife, so I handed the knife to him without thinking.

Jiang Xiaotian happily took the knife and immediately cut his finger. I gaped at the sight. The Ice Emperor wanted to play with an *ice* knife and even got *cut*?

“Children shouldn't play with knives.”

I hastily took back the knife, but Jiang Xiaotian's face immediately crumpled, looking like he was about to burst into tears. His eyes were still fixed on the knife. Seeing him like that, I wanted to cry myself. *O Ice Emperor, you're the idol I most respect and adore, and the one person I want to emulate in this life. But how can your fan still worship you when you're like this?*

I took out a bandage for Xiaotian's finger from the backpack, but once I wiped the blood away, the wound was nowhere to be seen. I stared at his finger for a moment before putting away the bandages. When I next looked around, the child had started crying in earnest. He didn't make a single sound, but tears ran down his cheeks and dripped to the floor. My heart ached at the sight.

Quickly, I conjured a tiny ice hammer for Jiang Xiaotian. This was a good toy for children, and if an aberrant really came springing out of nowhere, it could even be used to whack their heads. *So useful!*

Jiang Xiaotian immediately brightened up as he clutched the tiny ice hammer. Although he still had streaks of tears on his cheeks, he looked the picture of joy.

I rubbed his head, then took his little hand and progressed to the next house. I didn't know whether we were lucky or not. After searching seven or eight houses, we'd found a fair amount of food but not a single aberrant.

I sunk into deep thought. Situations like this happened at the beginning of the apocalypse mostly because there was a particularly

powerful presence nearby, so nothing else dared to approach.

Maybe a tier one aberrant? If so, that's perfect. Xiaotian needs a tier one aberrant's crystal.

After continually defeating a few tier one aberrants over the past few days, I was confident that I should be able to handle that tier. Worst come to worst, we could manage to run away. So rather than being afraid of running into aberrants, I was more concerned about the problems that would crop up if Xiaotian continued to starve.

After going through another five or six houses, we still hadn't encountered any aberrants. We found even more supplies, so much that I couldn't fit them into my backpack. I had to grab another big bag, and I filled it with bread, cans, and drinks. I even stuffed in a few changes of clothes and shoes for Xiaotian.

In the end, I couldn't bring myself to leave behind the cans of food we'd found. I resorted to child labor and got Jiang Xiaotian to help me carry some stuff. Of course, his bag was full of instant noodles while mine was full of cans.

It might seem like we'd managed to find quite some stuff, but this was actually the bounty from over a dozen houses, and we had to dig through less conspicuous places. These houses had been searched before, but because it was just the start of the apocalypse and supplies weren't that hard to come by, the raiders hadn't been thorough in their search.

Maybe a powerful group wiped out all the aberrants here, then left

after ransacking the place, so that's why this area is empty?

It was certainly a possibility. Thinking back to the area around our home, it had been equally empty of humans and aberrants and stripped clean of all supplies.

With that settled, I decided that we should stay the night. The sky was already pitch black, so we might as well catch some sleep. Once the sun rose, we would go for a wander around the town center. If we really couldn't find any aberrants, then we'd move on swiftly to find the next place to hunt for crystals to feed Xiaotian.

I found a comparatively clean house, which even had a gas stove. I could heat up whatever food I could manage and finally have a hot meal.

Jiang Xiaotian ate, but he kept eyeing the hipflask. Food alone wasn't enough to satisfy him.

"Xiaotian, can you bear with it? Is it very uncomfortable?" I was worried whether or not the Ice Emperor's energy could last. *Would he really "starve" to death?*

Jiang Xiaotian's eyes started brimming with tears, but he refused to cry. He simply nodded as he replied, "I'm so hungry."

When I heard that, I instantly gave up on my plan of sleeping. Anyway, my body was pretty robust and missing a night's sleep wouldn't affect me much.

"Okay, then we won't sleep. Let's go hunting for crystals."

Jiang Xiaotian rubbed his eyes, mumbling, "But Xiaotian wants to sleep."

That was troublesome. After racking my brain for some time, I took him along my search in the outside area. Fortunately, we managed to locate a motorcycle that was parked in a garage. It came with sturdy leather saddlebags that hung off its back, so I could put away the supplies and secure Xiaotian at my front by wrapping a light blanket around us.

We really had hit the jackpot. A motorcycle was far more mobile than a car, but no one had taken it. Perhaps the ones who had ransacked this place were part of a big group, so they didn't think a motorcycle would come in handy? Furthermore, with aberrants everywhere, most people preferred to drive a car, so at least there would be a layer of metal between themselves and the aberrants.

This was perfect for me, however, since I couldn't wait for aberrants to throw themselves at me.

My Xiaotian is hungry!

"Xiaotian, you sleep first."

At my bidding, the child closed his eyes and seemed to fall asleep immediately. *Is he tired or just hungry?* Increasingly worried, I advanced toward the town center on the motorcycle.

This town wasn't that big, and soon enough I pulled to a stop near the taller buildings. There were still no aberrants to be found. If this really was the work of a large group, they probably weren't far away.

I frowned. I still had to catch up with Dàgē and the others, and I really didn't want to get tangled up with any more people. If not for the fact that Xiaotian was hungry, I'd have continued the pursuit after finding some food.

After passing through another street, I happened to look up, then had to brake immediately at the sight, astonished at what was in the distance.

It was a *giant* tree.

Ten stories tall, it wouldn't have been out of place deep in the mountains or in an ancient forest, but this was a small town. Trees simply didn't grow to that size in urban areas. If not for the fact that the tree had very few branches and leaves and happened to be hidden by the tall buildings around it, I'd have spotted it long ago.

No wonder. So the reason why there aren't any aberrants here is because they were all eaten by this tree?

Seeing as I'd made it all the way here without getting attacked, the tree hadn't turned aberrant yet. This also explained why there weren't any aberrants or humans to be found in this small town. Aberrants had turned into nourishment, and while humans probably would quite like this small town, they'd be scared away by the sight of the big tree.

"Oh, a banyan tree!"

Xiaotian, who was lying against my chest, suddenly cried out, and only then did I realize he was awake and staring at the tree. *A banyan tree?* I wasn't too familiar with the different types of trees, and this tree had very few leaves, so it was hard to tell.

This town probably didn't have any aberrants, so we'd have to travel during the night and try our luck at other places. Just as I was able to leave, Jiang Xiaotian started to become restless.

"I don't wanna go. I want to sleep!"

I smiled as I said, "Xiaotian can sleep. I don't need Xiaotian to steer the bike."

Jiang Xiaotian frantically shook his head while nestled against me, repeating once again, "I wanna sleep *here*. I wanna sleep in a *bed*."

My heart of a thirty-five year old woman melted at the sensation of the little head rubbing against my chest in refusal. *How could I possibly say no?* So I found a place to park the motorcycle, and set off like a housewife who had come back from the market, multiple bags in both hands and a child lying against her chest. I found a clean house and kicked open the door... *Whoa, that's a corpse lying in the living room. Next!*

By the time I'd found a place and had cleaned up the bed, Xiaotian was already sound asleep. Moving carefully so I wouldn't wake him up, I placed the child on the bed. Then, I settled into a deck chair in the

room to take stock of the supplies we had. The food was enough to last a week between Xiaotian and me. As for water, we didn't take much, since I could create ice myself. At most, we had taken some drinks that had calories.

The weather was starting to turn cold. In the past, autumn could be so hot that it was as ferocious as a tiger, but the temperatures now were quite cool, particularly in the evenings and mornings. People with weaker constitutions would already need to start wearing jackets.

I sized up Xiaotian's clothing, feeling like it wasn't enough for him. The Ice Emperor could probably run around buck naked in deep winter with no problems, but now that he was a mini Ice Emperor, I didn't feel confident about his ability to handle the cold. I had to make sure he was wrapped up warmly.

I walked over to the children's room next door. Just now, while checking out the house, I'd noticed that this was a family of three generations— a couple with two children, and while I wasn't sure if both grandparents had still been around, the photographs covering the wall all had a pair of grandparents, so it was clear the family was very tight-knit.

The door to the children's room had been destroyed, to the point where there was hardly any of it left. Blood covered the floorboards, and a set of tracks outlined in blood extended all the way from the small, race car-shaped bed to the entrance.

The other bed had once been a small, white bed with pretty floral engravings, but now it was dyed almost completely in a deep red.

So there had been at least two aberrants of different types, which explained why they hadn't been willing to eat in the same room. One had directly devoured the girl in her bed, while the other had dragged the boy out.

Were they the parents or the grandparents?

Speaking of which, children almost never turned into aberrants in the black fog. If they turned aberrant, most of the time it was because they had died. But at the beginning of the apocalypse, every aberrant was very hungry, and whenever they caught hold of a person, they would gobble up every bit of them, even the bones, so very few children had the chance to change into aberrants.

It was both a tragedy and a relief. A tragedy, because of what had happened to the children, but a relief because I didn't need to deal with children-turned-aberrants. Just imagining them made me feel sick and sad.

I quickly rummaged around for a coat and thick pants in this oppressive children's room, then returned to the main bedroom.

Lying on the bed while hugging Jiang Xiaotian, I once again was reminded of how lucky I was to still have a child I could hug to sleep. Once I found my dàgē and xiǎomèi, the four siblings would live together in pure bliss!

As a result of being too happy, I overslept the next day. After quickly washing up, I dashed to the kitchen to prepare breakfast. I returned to the room with two plates covered in food to see Xiaotian had woken up

already. He was sitting on the bed, looking somewhat lost and even a little panicked.

"Time to eat!"

The child jolted and his head jerked up, finally noticing my presence. His eyes widened a little, then he stared at me hungrily.

As expected of Dàgē, his eyes were always so expressive.

"Jiang Xiaotian, what's got you staring with such wide eyes?" I strode forward and set the plates on the bedside table, ordering, "Go brush your teeth and wash your face, then come back and eat."

The corner of the child's mouth lifted, and he said with a smile that was not a smile, "Jiang. Xiao. Tian?"

...

I had little choice but to verify, "Dàgē, have you recovered your memory?"

"Yes." Jiang Xiaotian arched an eyebrow and stood on the bed, giving off the aura of a king. Unfortunately, he still had the appearance of a three year-old kid, so he couldn't cow people into obedience. Instead, he went from a cute little kid into a bad boy who needed a good spanking.

"Then..." I gave it some thought and concluded, "Dàgē, go brush your teeth and wash your face, or the food will get cold."

Mini Ice Emperor nodded, the kingly aura vanishing, and he turned into an obedient child who walked into the bathroom.

The soft, huggable child was gone, making me a little down. But it was terrific that the Ice Emperor was able to recover his memories, and super terrific for all of humanity! If I wanted a soft, huggable child, I could always have one later, but the Ice Emperor was a once in a lifetime opportunity, and you wouldn't get another if you missed him!

"Um, *ahem*. Shuyu, I can't reach the sink."

"..."

What happened to being cool, suave, and handsome? What happened to leading humanity into a prosperous future? Our Ice Emperor can't even reach the sink to brush his teeth. What should I do?

Trying to school my expression so that I didn't look like I was about to cry, I found a small stool for the Ice Emperor to stand on. Then, under the watchful gaze from his little face filled with embarrassment, I excused myself from the bathroom. I wasn't going to stay there and watch the almighty Ice Emperor brush his teeth with a child's toothbrush.

The mini Ice Emperor exited the bathroom, his eyes locking on me the moment he looked over. It was almost as if just by looking at me, he could fulfill all his desires in life. But he suddenly frowned and panicked, hollering, "Shuyu, where's Shujun?"

I quickly replied, "Shujun's with Dàgē, along with Uncle, Auntie, and the mercenaries. Everyone's still alive! I'm the only one separated from the group, so I'm trying to catch up with them."

Mini Ice Emperor looked stunned... *it's really weird calling him that. Whatever, I'm still calling him Jiang Xiaotian. When he reverts back to his original size one day, then I'll call him the Ice Emperor again!*

Pairing this adorable appearance with the mighty title of the Ice Emperor was the ultimate irony, and every time I called him that, I wanted to cry.

Jiang Xiaotian frowned as he said, "Shujun isn't with me."

"She's with the past you," I hastily explained. "Dàgē, don't forget that you've traveled through space *and* time. Right now, this world has two Dàgēs."

"But at the time, I wasn't by your side," he said in a tone of bewilderment. Then, his expression darkened. "The apocalypse came, but Dàgē wasn't by your side. I..."

I cut him off. "Dàgē, you were in fact with us. Before the coming of the apocalypse, I had a prophetic dream, and I warned you. Then..." I explained that, because of the prophetic dream, I knew the apocalypse was coming, so I made him return home sooner. So now, everything had changed.

Jiang Xiaotian was both shocked and confused. Frowning, he said, "If the past has changed, how can there still be a me to travel back to the past? It doesn't make sense."

Dàgē, your logic sure is something. Much as I'd like to explain about parallel universes, I don't think I can know about parallel universes from a prophetic dream...

Okay, honestly, I don't dare to tell this Dàgē about Guan Weijun.

"Does your neck still hurt?" Jiang Xiaotian asked suddenly. I discovered I had unconsciously placed my hand against my neck. He looked guilty, not knowing what to do, and he looked down at his little hands, seeming to want to chop them off.

I intentionally wailed in the most tragic way possible, "I-it hurts a lot! Dàgē, you better pay me back for this; otherwise, I'll never forgive you! So, why don't you teach me how to use the ice ability?"

Jiang Xiaotian nodded solemnly, and responded in absolute seriousness, "Of course. I never imagined that Shuyu would also become an ice user. I have a lot of experience I can pass on to you."

When I heard that, I exploded with joy.

My teacher's going to be the Ice Emperor! Can I get any luckier? What should I do? Suddenly, these apocalyptic days seem so happy? Will I get beat up for being so happy?

"When I meet up with my past self, he'll need to train even harder with his ice abilities. You two need to become stronger to protect Shujun, Uncle, and Auntie!"

"Ah. Dàgē, actually your other self doesn't have ice abilities. Because things have changed, it seems like his ability has been affected as well."

Jiang Xiaotian was momentarily stunned. Then, he nodded to indicate his understanding and asked, "So what is it now?"

"Healing."

When he heard that, Jiang Xiaotian's little brow frowned deeply, and it took a long while before he could force out his next words, "Shuyu, you're going to have more to do."

"Nah, Shujun's electricity powers are pretty strong, too. She's really amazing!"

Jiang Xiaotian stared at me, stupefied, and asked in disbelief, "Electricity? Shujun?"

A three year-old wearing a dazed, silly expression was super adorable! Unable to resist teasing Jiang Xiaotian, I grabbed his hand, pledging, "Dàgē, don't worry. Shujun and I will *a/ways* protect you. You just have to keep healing us from behind. Your dìdi and mèimei will handle everything, so no one will get past us to hurt you!"

Jiang Xiaotian's expression became so complex, it was impossible to describe.

Footnotes

¹ **"mu"**: A unit of measure for area used with fields that equals to one fifteenth of a hectare, or 667 m².

Chapter #9: Jiang Xiaorong

I exited the house and dumped the pile of supplies on the motorcycle. When I looked back I saw the little face, which had been stuck in a gloomy expression for the better half of the day, watching me with a grim expression.

"Shuyu, you're lying to me, aren't you?" Without waiting for me to respond, he analyzed what I had said, "Even with a healing ability, I wouldn't be someone under protection. If you say this is the fourth month into the apocalypse, guns are still useful, and even without guns, I'd be able to fight with a knife."

I grinned and chuckled, "Of course. Dàgē, you really believed me? Don't worry, even when Dàgē's ability is healing, it's still awesome. There were quite a few times when I wondered whether or not your ability truly is healing."

He kept his eyes fixed on me, a faint smile crossing his face, and he remarked, "I'd forgotten you were this kind of person. I only remembered you were very protective of family."

My smile froze. *Are you suspecting me or just reminiscing? Make it clear, Dàgē, I'm really nervous now!*

But even if I was nervous, it wasn't to the same extent as earlier on when I'd rather be strangled to death. *I want to live together with Dàgē, Xiaomèi, Uncle, and Auntie in the apocalypse. I am Jiang Shuyu!*

"Is Shujun all right? Has she gotten used to the apocalypse?"

I nodded, replying, "Everyone's holding up quite well. If not for that little accident, we'd probably still be at home, with a basement full of supplies, shooting aberrants with guns, eating crystals, and training our special abilities."

Jiang Xiaotian started lecturing me in earnest, "There's nothing wrong with leaving, Shuyu. You must remember to never live too comfortably, because that will make you become weak. Since my other self's ability is healing, then you must be responsible for protecting the family."

This struck me as a bit strange. Although I agreed that I needed to become stronger, it felt wrong hearing Dàgē wanting me to take responsibility for protecting our family. You had to know, even if Dàgē's ability was healing, he had still taken on the mantle of protecting our family, and had even insisted that I get a love life!

And the personage in front of me was the Ice Emperor, okay? With him here, I'd be lucky if I wasn't relegated to the role of being a useless boy toy, but now he wanted me to be responsible for protecting our entire family? It didn't sound like what Dàgē would say... unless he was no longer capable of protecting me.

"Dàgē, can you still turn back into an adult?"

Jiang Xiaotian nodded, saying, "If I have enough crystals."

I fell silent. If I was reading between the lines correctly, that meant he had no way of transforming back without enough crystals. And given that the apocalypse had just started, it was impossible for there to be

enough crystals to heal the Ice Emperor! He had been injured so badly that he had even reverted into a child, so just what tier of crystals was needed?

"What tier crystals do you need?"

Jiang Xiaotian shook his head, not responding. It was expected, since there was nothing either of us could do about it, so there wasn't much point pursuing this matter. I had better become strong as soon as possible; otherwise, how would I be able to hunt aberrants to rescue the Ice Emperor? Just the thought of me actually being able to save the Ice Emperor made my blood boil in excitement!

This feeling of being able to save my idol was simply too incredible. I said enthusiastically, "Dàgē, you must be hungry, right? Once we've left this town, I'll go hunt down some crystals for you."

But Jiang Xiaotian shook his head as he said, "No, low tiered crystals don't have any effect on me. You eat them. What's important is that you need to become stronger."

I hesitated a moment before nodding. Although tierless crystals were useless for me too, the mercenaries would still benefit from them, so I might as well save it for them instead.

"You mentioned needing to leave the town before hunting for crystals. Why? Have you cleared out this town already?"

As if! If I could, I'd be starting my world conquest already! Why would I even want to go sightseeing in this town?

"Not me. I think that tree ate up all the aberrants."

I pointed at the giant tree standing between the tall buildings in the distance.

Jiang Xiaotian looked over, and his eyes suddenly lit up. "That tree's going to die soon. It probably evolved down the wrong path and won't be able to survive much longer."

Really? I looked at Jiang Xiaotian in incomprehension.

"Plants run into these situations very easily. They would evolve in a certain direction but don't know how to moderate themselves. Then, they'll die because they evolved too much in a certain way. That tree was probably blocked from the sunlight by the shadows of the tall buildings in the past, and so it had never been able to grow properly. And after the black fog came, it started trying to grow as tall as possible."

Jiang Xiaotian seemed very interested in that tree, keeping his gaze away from me in a rare show of interest as he appraised the tree.

"Let's go over for a look. Maybe we'll find something handy."

I didn't object. The Ice Emperor knew much more about the apocalyptic world than I did, so I couldn't go wrong by listening to him. I climbed on board the motorcycle and slowly rode there. There wasn't a problem with the motorcycle, but rather, the closer we got to the town center, the more abandoned cars there were. The pavement was

also filled with all kinds of obstacles, so it was impossible to ride quickly.

Suddenly, I caught sight of something, and I stopped the motorcycle.

"What is it?" Jiang Xiaotian's words were lined with caution.

"There's a bookstore here. I need to get a map. Dàgē said they were going toward Luo'an City, but I don't know how to get there."

"Luo'an City? I've never heard of it." Jiang Xiaotian said with uncertainty, "Is it a small city?"

"No clue." Frankly, as an outsider from another world, I really wasn't too familiar with the names of places here.

Jiang Xiaotian nodded. "Okay, you go. I'll watch the supplies here."

Hearing that, I headed into the bookstore myself. This place was quite tidy, probably because no one wanted to search a bookstore, and I quickly got my hands on a map. I also took some pens and a notebook.

First, I had a quick flip through the map book. Luo'an City wasn't a small city; it was comparable to Zhongguan City in size, making it a mid-sized city. The three largest cities in Meisia were quite similar to those of my previous world, except that their locations were slightly off, though you could say that they were in the north, middle, and southern parts of the continent just like the other world.

Based on my knowledge from my past life, these three cities weren't

human territories. They were the largest adventuring areas where it was easy to strike gold and even easier to never make it out alive.

But that didn't matter to me at the moment. What was important was Luo'an City being around four hundred kilometers from here. It was neither close nor far, and probably also the reason why Dàgē had picked that city to rest in.

I tucked away the map and headed back to Jiang Xiaotian.

"Is Luo'an City far?" Having a little person sitting on top of a motorcycle painted a somewhat odd picture, but at the same time, it was an incredible cute sight! I really wanted to kiss him on his cheeks and rub his head, but unfortunately, Xiaotian had regained his memories, so I didn't dare to do so.

"About four hundred kilometers."

Jiang Xiaotian nodded and said, "Let's hurry there after checking out the tree. I can't relax until I see Shujun."

"And Uncle, Auntie, and your mercenary troop," I reminded him. This Dàgē was too obsessed with me and Shujun. He'd forgotten the existence of everyone else.

"Uncle and Auntie?" His eyes lit up and he asked quickly, "Who from the troop are there?"

I climbed aboard the motorcycle and once again advanced toward the tree. As we rode on, I counted them out. "Zheng Xing, Yunqian, Xiao

Sha, Lily..."

Two streets later, we could see the roots of the tree. The closer we got, the more shocking the sight. It also proved Jiang Xiaotian's words to be true. The tree didn't have many branches or leaves, and there were patches of bark that had dried up. It really was going to die soon.

"Lily?" came the low murmur of a child from behind me.

"What about Lily?" *I've gone through so many names, so why did he focus on Lily?*

There was a long moment of silence before another sentence came from behind, "She was the person who stayed with me to the very end."

Damn, why's it sound like I can dig up so much juicy gossip from this one liner? Don't tell me Lily's now my sister-in-law? I chortled and asked, "Don't tell me I've got to call Lily sister-in-law?"

Jiang Xiaotian froze, then said, "No. Back then, I had only wanted to rush home to find you and Shujun, and I couldn't think about anything else. At the time, there were a lot of the troops who followed me, quite a lot more than the ones you just mentioned, but on the way..."

He lapsed into silence once more.

I finally understood what he had meant by "stayed to the very end." Perhaps they had left or they had died, but if they had just gone, Jiang Xiaotian probably wouldn't react this way. I knew that my Dàgē would

always respect his mercenaries' choices, and wouldn't hold a grudge against them. *So most of them had probably died?*

I didn't dare to continue my line of questioning. It was obvious that there had been a lot of tragedies, so I'd step onto a landmine no matter what question I asked. I was better off changing the subject. "Dàgē, we're at the tree."

I parked the motorcycle. Jiang Shutian hopped off the motorcycle himself and made a beeline for the tree.

The tree was gigantic, its trunk wide enough that you needed at least ten people holding hands to circle around it. The sight when looking up from its roots was even more stunning.

Jiang Xiaotian hopped onto a tree root and made his way up along it. Then, he started touching various parts of the tree.

I asked curiously, "Dàgē, what are you doing?"

"Plants have a unique characteristic where sometimes, they don't die completely. Shuyu, take me up." Jiang Xiaotian pointed in one direction with a finger. "Climb up that way."

"Can I use my ice powers?" I inspected the tree. It didn't have many branches, and they were all very far apart from each other, so there was nowhere I could step.

"Yes."

Then that was fine. I took off my shoes and socks, scooped up Xiaotian, and formed a thin film of ice on the soles of my feet. Then, I hopped and leapt up the tree. Although I could also do it with my shoes on, just like how I could craft ice knives in mid-air without direct contact, generally speaking, it was much faster and easier creating ice directly from skin contact.

"Stop here."

I did as he said. We were halfway up the tree, but this spot didn't look any different from any of the other branches. Just when I was about to ask, I saw Jiang Xiaotian staring at my feet.

"Don't wear shoes or sneakers anymore. They'll only get in the way. If you are ambushed by aberrants, do you think you have the luxury of taking off your shoes and socks?"

Ugh. Right now, I still don't dare to skate in combat, so this problem hadn't occurred to me.

"Dàgē, you don't normally wear shoes?"

Don't tell me the mighty Ice Emperor and General fought bare-footed? The image doesn't look right!

Probably because my expression was too strange, Jiang Xiaotian said grumpily, "I do, but right now, you mustn't wear any. You need to get used to using your ice ability when walking."

"I can only skate?" This was a tall order. Not only were certain things

impossible to do if I could only skate-walk, it was also very energy intensive.

"Skating, freezing pieces of ice to step on, using a thin layer of ice to reduce the speed of falling and so on. Once your power becomes stronger, you can jump off a tall building without getting hurt, and by then, there won't be anywhere in the world you can't reach."

I gave a worshipful look to Jiang Xiaotian. It felt good switching from stealing techniques to becoming a proper student. I no longer had to rack my brains while trying to figure out how else I could use my ice powers.

"Shuyu, you have a lot to learn." Jiang Xiaotian looked at me very seriously, and continued, "I'll be extremely strict, so you need to be prepared. No matter how tough it is or how tired you get, I won't let you give up."

I immediately swore a solemn oath to Dàgē, "Dàgē, don't worry. No matter how tough or tiring it gets, I'll never give up!"

"I believe you," Jiang Xiaotian nodded as he spoke. "It's obvious from your degree of training just four months into the apocalypse that you've put in no small amount of effort. But this isn't enough. If you want to become one of the elite powerhouses, it's nowhere near enough."

I stared at Jiang Xiaotian. I wasn't patting myself on my back, but I'd only reached tier one after quite a number of close brushes with death. *So how much did Dàgē go through back then in order to become the*

Ice Emperor? And could I pull off the same?

Jiang Xiaotian seemed to sense my hesitation. He frowned, and proclaimed in a majestic tone of voice that one wouldn't expect from a child, "Jiang Shuyu, you *will* become the new Ice Emperor!"

My heart throbbed, and I immediately responded, "Yes, sir!"

After the brothers' declaration of their ambitious goals, Jiang Xiaotian reached out with his little hands and said, "Carry me."

I ignored how messed up the whole situation was, while Jiang Xiaotian was probably ignoring any sense of shame, and the younger brother picked up his little Dàgē. Jiang Xiaotian pointed at a particular branch, and only then did I discover that there was a little sprout there. It was extremely delicate and cute, with two pale green, tender leaves and a narrow stem that was only a finger long.

Jiang Xiaotian stared at the sprout, thinking about something.

And I wasn't sure if it was just me, but I felt like the sprout seemed to tremble under the weight of Jiang Xiaotian's gaze. Oh, it wasn't just me, it even curled up its two leaves. *Oi, are you a mimosa? Xiaotian already said you're a banyan tree, so don't pretend to be a weed!*

"As expected of Dàgē, even the tree knows it should be scared of you." Jiang Xiaotian gave me an odd look. "He's not afraid of me, but you."

Afraid of me? I was bamboozled by the idea that I could make a giant tree so scared that it would start trembling.

"You've got a pretty good level of energy for this point in time, so you can probably rule a town, no problem. If this tree hadn't wasted its energy, it wouldn't lose to you, but it picked the wrong evolution route and wasted all the evolution crystals it had eaten. Right now, it's not much stronger than a new born aberrant, so it's only natural that it's scared of you."

I see. So this little tree is so young that it hasn't yet discovered how mighty my demon king of a Dàgē is. It can only sense the depths of power of a little boss like me, so it's scared of me but not Dàgē. He looks but he doesn't see... Er, wait, he doesn't have eyes to see.

"Shuyu, get a pot so we can cultivate him. Although the tree was stupid enough to use all its energy in growing tall, it's not easy to get this big in these times, so there might be something special about it. Think of it as cultivating potential. Just feed him some excess crystals you have and he'll be good."

As expected of my Dàgē, his way of thinking is identical to mine when I saw Chen Qianru.

While extracting the little tree, he clung desperately to his old branch, refusing to let go. If he had a mouth, he'd probably scream the skies down, and I was struck with the sudden feeling that I was an evil tyrant kidnapping a peasant woman.

With the mischievous feeling of "hehe, it's useless to struggle," I planted the little tree into the pot and said triumphantly, "From now onwards, I'm your master. You'll be called... called Jiang Xiaorong, the

rong from banyan tree! If Xiaorong is obedient, then you'll get water, sunlight, and crystals. If you're bad, I'll shower you with acid! Do you hear me?"

"Probably not." Jiang Xiaotian abruptly killed my passion for raising pets, "Plants right now still can't communicate with us."

I know, but isn't the point of raising a pet in order to enjoy talking to yourself?

Equipped with Xiaotian and Xiaorong, I once again continued on my journey to find my family. Since Jiang Xiaotian said that I didn't need to hunt for crystals, I just gunned it in the direction of Dàgē and Xiaomèi.

As expected, riding the motorcycle made the journey much smoother, and I had a lot of fun zipping through obstacles. But having Xiaotian around made my journey much more difficult.

When I saw a road that was jam-packed with a bunch of cars, just as I was thinking of taking a detour around to the other side, over the grass—

"Use your ice energy to push aside the cars in our way."

When I saw a ton of aberrants milling around a town that we were passing by, just as I was thinking to twist hard on the throttle and rush through—

"Get off and deal with those aberrants. Hand over your knife and gun.

You can only use your ice powers.”

When I was planning on picking a house randomly to stay the night—

“Use ice to create an Eskimo igloo and sleep. You need to last the night without it melting.”

Although I was tempted to suggest that we should be hurrying to catch up with Dàgē and the others, I saw the look of seriousness on Jiang Xiaotian’s face that didn’t match his child-like appearance and thought that the mighty Ice Emperor had to know what was more important.

Even if we reached Luo’an City, there was no guarantee that we’d be able to find them. It had already been ten-odd days, and if Dàgē and co. wanted to find me, who had been snatched away by the bird, they would never stay in one place. So how reasonable was it to abandon all training until later and chase after them, in hopes that we’d be able to catch up?

Of course, we had to find them, but we couldn’t just ignore training. Jiang Xiaotian had said I should be able to take over a small town, but was that really such an amazing thing? A mere tree had been able to take over a small town. As a human with the added advantage of being reincarnated, I still couldn’t do any better. How humiliating was that?!

I did everything that Jiang Xiaotian suggested, and not a single objection crossed my lips. But when I heard that I had to maintain the igloo for the entire night, my expression still darkened. I had spent the

whole day on the motorcycle, and I had even beat up a bunch of aberrants, so the only thing I wanted to do was sleep. But now that I had to maintain the igloo and stop it from melting, how could I get any sleep?

Jiang Xiaotian rested his head against the backpack, hugging Jiang Xiaorong, and he spoke as he lay there comfortably, "Once you're used to it, you can maintain ice energy even when asleep."

The problem was that I wasn't the slightest bit used to it, and with my current energy levels, I probably wouldn't be able to keep it up until morning.

"Energy is like cleavage. If you squeeze hard enough, there will always be more."

I really wanted to retort that I was fated to never have cleavage in this life, he was too late, when Jiang Xiaotian spelled out the reason in a matter-of-fact tone of voice, "Only by continually surpassing your own limits will you be able to become one of the elite."

And so, I had nothing more to say and crafted the igloo. I maintained it as I tried my best to fall asleep, but every time my consciousness was about to slip into slumber, I was kicked awake by Jiang Xiaotian. "The igloo's melting."

I had no choice but to continue staying awake to hold up the igloo, slowly falling asleep and getting kicked awake again. The cycle of sleeping and waking continued through to morning, and when I got out of bed, I felt like I hadn't slept at all.

This continued for a full three days, and by the third evening, my eyelids felt like lead while my energy stores remained firmly in the empty state. I felt terrible.

"Shuyu..." Jiang Xiaotian gazed at me, keeping silent although something was clearly on his mind.

"Hm?" As I made the igloo, I looked over at him. *Some new training again?*

Jiang Xiaotian just watched me. He was still hugging onto Jiang Xiaorong. The tree had originally tried escaping at every possible opportunity. Our attention just had to slip for a second, then we'd be guaranteed to hear the sound of *pa* as my potted plant jumped off the bike once again.

But on the first evening, while I was struggling between sleeping and maintaining the igloo, Jiang Xiaotian must have done something, because the next day, Jiang Xiaorong didn't dare to jump off the bike anymore. He just remained motionless in Jiang Xiaotian's arms, like he was an ordinary potted plant that didn't jump off bikes and wouldn't twist his roots like worms in order to get away.

Jiang Xiaotian said hesitantly, "Shuyu, you must be very tired? Why don't you take a break tonight? Perhaps rushing things will have the opposite effect. Getting enough rest is necessary, too."

He was speaking in a very roundabout fashion, and it was clear that although he didn't agree with it, he wanted to let me rest.

I couldn't help but burst out laughing. Dàgē really was Dàgē. Even though he had experienced ten years of the apocalypse and knew all too well that the world worked on a no pain, no gain principle, he still couldn't stand letting his younger siblings suffer.

"Shuyu, how old are you now?" Jiang Xiaotian said with a frown, "I remember you're still eighteen, right? You're still young, so really..." I interrupted him. "Eighteen means I'm an adult, Dàgē."

I still remembered the times I had spent fleeing from trouble in the apocalypse. Things had been much worse back then, as I'd spend the daytime squirreling around without any plan in mind, only knowing that I had to find food or starve, while at night, I'd curl up into a tight ball and sleep a light sleep, jumping awake at every little sound and motion.

Those days were spent not only physically exhausted, but mentally in despair as I didn't know what the point of living was.

At the time, I hadn't eaten any crystals, and I was far weaker than I was now. I had managed back then, so there was no excuse for me to not manage now. These past four months really had been too good to me. If I had gone into Zhongguan City earlier, the area I could lay claim to probably wouldn't just be a small town, but a small city. You really couldn't afford to slack off in the apocalyptic world.

I ate one crystal and finished off the igloo, then patted the backpack, saying, "Come sleep, Dàgē." Then, after a moment's thought, I grinned and corrected myself, "No, wait. You can't sleep, you need to

kick me awake.”

Fortunately, Jiang Xiaotian could sleep while I was riding the motorcycle during the day. *Otherwise, his condition might even get worse?*

Jiang Xiaotian looked at me, nodded, and crawled over to sleep.

I, too, lay down and almost fell asleep there and then. I almost didn't dare to close my eyes. I'd pass out the moment I shut them, but I couldn't just keep going like this. Even if I ate evolution crystals for meals, there was bound to be a limit on that, so I had to quickly learn how to keep my special abilities active while sleeping...

I jolted awake abruptly, and I immediately focused my eyes above me. A sea of white greeted me. The igloo was still standing, but I seemed to have really fallen asleep. *Did I drop off for only a moment?*

I stuck my head out of the igloo to see the bright sky. It had been around ten at night when I last lay down, and I had fallen asleep soon after.

I stared at the igloo, stunned. *Had I really managed to keep the igloo from melting even while sleeping?*

I was overcome with excitement and wanted to tell Jiang Xiaotian, but he wasn't around. Fortunately, I spotted the small figure sitting on the motorcycle after a quick glance around, but for some reason, there was something off with that little silhouette. My excitement died in an instant, and I called out tentatively, “Dàgē?”

The small body flinched and quickly hid whatever it was holding and stuffed it back into the backpack. But I already knew what it was—the map.

So he found out it's a parallel universe? But I had to pretend to be ignorant, because I'd only told Jiang Xiaotian about prophetic dreams, so I had no way of explaining how I knew about parallel universes.

What a headache. One lie really does make many. I didn't actually intend to keep lying to Jiang Xiaotian my entire life, but I just wanted to avoid unnecessary complications. I'd thought that my confession could wait until after we'd found Dàgē and Shujun.

What should I do now?

As I struggled with the question, Jiang Xiaotian just cut through my thoughts, saying calmly, "Get some water so we can brush our teeth and wash our faces. You slept quite well last night, so we can head out earlier today."

When I saw that, I breathed a sigh of relief. As expected of the Ice Emperor, his ability to accept things and move on was on a completely different level to peasants like me.

After washing up, I checked on my energy levels, then made a face as I said, "Dàgē, my energy levels have bottomed out. I can only recover a little even if I eat crystals. If we run into too many aberrants, things might get dangerous."

As Jiang Xiaotian brushed his teeth with a child's toothbrush, he darted a look at me. *That's definitely a look of disdain, definitely!*

He spat out the mouthwash, then asked, "So you can't fight if you don't have any energy?"

I looked at the gun and knife. I had no hopes that Jiang Xiaotian would let me use the gun, so I compromised, "Can I use the knife?"

"It depends."

In other words, it was possible that I had to duke it out with aberrants with just my hands and no special abilities. Fine, I did need to train my close quarters combat. Although I did have Guan Weijun's experience as a foundation, and it didn't lose out to the mercenaries, when comparing it to the Ice Emperor, however, I was not much different than a three year old.

I climbed onto the motorcycle and listened to "Jiang Xiaotian's Combat Classroom" as we rode.

"Your skills can be said to be acceptable, but it's obvious that you don't have a good foundation." Here, Jiang Xiaotian asked in confusion, "Shuyu, did you learn all this in these four months? I remember that you were very sporty, but you had never learned techniques like these."

To begin with, I didn't have any foundation to speak of. *What kind of office lady would have basic combat skills?* All my fighting skills had been honed by living in the apocalyptic world.

"Dàgē, in my prophetic dreams, I wasn't Jiang Shuyu but someone else. So I learned a lot while watching her fight, and I've been training these four months."

Jiang Xiaotian sunk into deep thought at my response, then suddenly asked, "Who were you in your dreams?"

"I was an ordinary woman called Guan Weijun. She's the woman of a small colony leader and she survived quite long in the apocalyptic world, close to ten years."

"Ten years? So that's why you don't know..." Jiang Xiaotian's voice became softer and softer until it trailed off.

"Don't know what?" I asked, curious.

"Nothing. It's enough to know ten years of the apocalypse. I wasn't around over here in the first few years, so I don't know what will happen. Since the me now can't become the Ice Emperor, the deviation of events in the later years will only grow bigger and bigger, so what I know isn't reliable. So it's not a big deal if I don't tell you."

That was true. I'd originally thought that the Ice Emperor should know a lot, but that thinking was too idealistic and reality was always much more brutal. I needed to train up properly. Being reincarnated only put me a few steps ahead of everyone else. I only needed to laze around a little and my advantage would vanish into thin air.

"So you might as well focus your time on training your skills and

abilities. As long as you are strong enough, nothing else really matters... What is it, Shuyu?"

I pulled the motorcycle around in a big arc and stopped at the side of the road. Then, I said softly, "Dàgē, there's a group of cars approaching from the road on the left."

Jiang Xiaotian was sitting behind me, so at this he stood up on the seat and peered over my shoulder.

There were a total of six cars. Four of them were RVs, and the remaining two were minibuses, which meant that there were probably more than twenty or thirty people in the group. I frowned. Just as I was thinking of avoiding them, the light, clear voice of a child came from behind.

"Shuyu, have you ever killed a person before?"

Chapter #10: Next Stop, Luo'an

"Huh?" I was stunned by his question. I hadn't a clue why Jiang Xiaotian was asking about this, but I replied honestly nonetheless, "Yeah, I've killed before."

Jiang Xiaotian glanced over me with a somewhat conflicted expression, then nodded and said, "Then never mind. I was originally thinking to give you some practice."

Whoa, suddenly I feel like I've just saved a bunch of innocent lives. I wiped away my cold sweat. As expected of the Ice Emperor who'd lived through ten years of the apocalypse: he no longer put much value on human life. Although I was much the same, I hadn't reached the stage where I could kill a person just to polish my skills. This was probably because I'd stayed in the safety of the colonies for too long in the later stages of the apocalypse.

But before that, I had killed my fair share of people too, particularly after my mom died and Xia Zhenggu started collecting women like they were goods. The me at that time couldn't care less about human lives, either.

"Let's go?" I ventured the question, wanting to get Jiang Xiaotian away from these people as soon as possible and prevent the Jiang family from becoming responsible for the extinction of all mankind.

"Okay..." Jian Xiaotian's tone of voice suddenly changed as he asked, "Shuyu, are those Hummers behind the minibuses?"

What?! I immediately looked. He was right. They'd been blocked by the minibuses, so I hadn't spotted them until now. More importantly, those Hummers weren't the civilian models, but military Humvees in camouflage colors!

"Dàgē, can I run away?" I asked in all seriousness.

Jiang Xiaotian gave me a look and said slowly, "You *leave*, you don't *run* away. If you want to run away, then I won't let you leave."

The whole business about "running away" versus "leaving" baffled the hell out of me. Whatever it was, we had to go. My energy levels were almost zero, so this wasn't a good time to cross paths with the military or mercenaries.

"Okay, let's leave."

When I saw the cars approaching the intersection we were at, I quickly wheeled around the motorcycle to go. But we hadn't even gone ten meters when we heard a voice coming from a megaphone,

"Stop the motorcycle right now or we will shoot!"

"..."

Why do you care so much about a motorcycle? Please just let me go? Don't you know I've got a nuclear missile at my back? Don't be so keen to commit suicide!

A sudden, cold laugh burst out from behind me, and a voice growled

so deeply that it was terrifying, despite being a child's voice, "Hmph, doing things the hard way, are you?!"

"Dàgē, are you okay?" Something was very wrong. Jiang Xiaotian's mood seemed exceptionally rotten today. I could only think of one thing that had happened between this morning and now, and that was him seeing the map. *Did the discovery about parallel universes affect him that much?*

Jiang Xiaotian patted my shoulder, reminding me, "Don't space out. They're coming."

I glanced at the rearview mirror. Just as I'd feared, they really were soldiers, all dressed in uniform. Still, that was better than mercenaries. Generally speaking, mercenaries were more ruthless than soldiers, and they tended to be the less savory types. Not every mercenary was as sweet as the ones in my invincible troop.

Three soldiers made their way over with guns at the ready. But once they got closer, their grim expressions relaxed a little, probably because of the sight of Jiang Xiaotian. People tended to be less wary when they encountered someone toting a three year-old around with them.

I got off the motorcycle. When I turned to gaze at the three soldiers, they looked a little surprised.

"Two children?"

The three soldiers lowered their guns, no longer pointing the muzzles

at me. They seemed decent enough people.

The soldier with the crew-cut asked, "Kid, why're you wandering around with such a young child? It's dangerous!"

"Shit, man, look at that face! Hehe, even those celebs on TV can't compare." The other guy who looked like the unruly sort stared fixedly at my face with bright eyes.

The moment the words left his mouth, the temperature immediately plummeted by quite a few degrees. *It definitely isn't my doing!* I quickly scooped Jiang Xiaotian into my arms and planted Jiang Xiaorong into his hands. It was better if those two small hands were occupied with holding a potted plant than busting people's heads open.

Suddenly, the oldest looking soldier of the three balked and barked out, "You there, say something!"

I blinked, replying, "Good morning."

"..." The soldier glared at me, but he looked less fierce than before, and he even breathed an almost imperceptible sigh of relief.

Nice sense of caution, Mister. You even have the sense to suspect whether I'm an aberrant. Even though aberrants now were all very ugly, one couldn't discount the possibility that there would be some that looked like humans. So currently, the easiest way of differentiating between aberrants and humans was indeed to get them to speak.

"Colonel," Crew-cut Soldier said in a troubled tone of voice, "Orders, sir? They're both children."

"Take them with us," the colonel replied unhesitatingly.

Unruly-looking Guy immediately perked up and looked at me excitedly on hearing that. The surrounding temperature slipped even lower.
These autumn days are chilly enough, Jiang Xiaotian. Stop making it colder already.

"Sorry, I've got to go." I immediately moved back to the motorcycle. The moment the situation turned sour, I'd hop onto the seat, rev hard on the throttle, and whiz away. I didn't think that these soldiers would be nuts enough to shoot people they saw as children.

The colonel snarled, "Don't be ridiculous. All survivors in the vicinity are to go to Luo'an City. There's a central shelter set up there."
I froze. "You're going to Luo'an City?"

"Didn't you hear the broadcast?" Unruly-looking Guy asked in amazement, "Aren't you going to Luo'an City because of the broadcast? This road leads to Luo'an City, so even if you want to go somewhere else, you have to pass through there. It's not that far away."

I really hadn't heard the broadcast. My goal was to find Dàgē and the others, and I couldn't care less about where other survivors were heading.

I contemplated my options. If Luo'an City had become the gathering

spot for survivors, then things were going to be tricky. Just getting into that city was hugely problematic. With everyone deathly scared of aberrants, we'd have to get past checkpoints in order to get into the city. If I were by myself, being held up was the least of my concerns. I was more worried about people with few scruples.

In chaotic times like this, I didn't think being a man would keep me safe when I had Jiang Shuyu's face.

Even with my ice powers, I couldn't win against numbers or guns. I wasn't so arrogant to think that I could hold my own against a row of guns as I was. I could probably make an escape in such a situation, but I needed to get *into* Luo'an City, so I could hardly just run away in the first place.

"I did. That's why I'm going there to find my missing family."

I adopted a wary expression as I darted a few glances at Unruly-looking Guy. He rubbed his nose before being dragged back a step by Crew-cut Soldier, who explained, "He's not a bad guy."

That was true. Although he sounded like he didn't care much for rules, the only thing he'd done so far was just stare at my face. He didn't make a single move on me, and his hands remained firmly gripped on his gun. He just so happened to be the kind of guy who ran his mouth. I frowned at the colonel, occasionally throwing a worried look at Unruly-looking Guy, pretending like I wanted to follow them but was worried about my own safety. While I was acting out my role, Jiang Xiaotian had his head up, eyes boring into me. I had to do my best not to break character. *Ice Emperor, your Majesty, are you training my*

acting skills or something? Can you stop staring at me like that?

The colonel spun on his heel and strode off, snapping, "Enough chit chat. Get him to gather his belongings and get in the car. If he doesn't want to go, force him on board!"

Crew-cut Soldier looked a bit flabbergasted at that and told me, "We really don't mean you any harm. Just come with us. Even if you don't care about yourself, think about your dìdi's safety. Once you're at Luo'an City, you can go wherever you want. No one will stop you."

Just as I was about to agree and go with the flow, Jiang Xiaotian suddenly wrapped his arms around my neck, crying out, "Daddy!"

"..." Ice Emperor, your Majesty, what on earth are you thinking?

A soft warning came from the bundle in my arms, "No puppy love. What's important now for you is to train up your power, *not* to fall in love. You need to train properly for at least the next two years, so no dating allowed!"

One dàgē is asking his dìdi to hook up with someone, and the other dàgē isn't allowing his dìdi any puppy love. Don't you know you two are killing me here?

Under the startled gazes of Crew-cut Soldier and Unruly-looking Guy, I silently gathered up my supplies, shouldered on my backpack, reluctantly abandoned the handy motorcycle, and followed the two into the cluster of cars.

Unruly-looking Guy suggested eagerly, "Come sit in our Humvee! If you like motorcycles, you'll definitely love our Humvee."

I did in fact like Humvees, because these kinds of vehicles could bash aside ordinary obstacles without any worry of breaking down. Unfortunately, it wasn't easy finding a Humvee on the streets.

"Shut up!" Crew-cut Soldier smacked his head and turned to instruct me, "Get into the bus at the back of the convoy."

I nodded and silently climbed onto the bus. Inside, all eyes swiveled to look at me. At first, there was discontent, probably because I had slowed them down—but then the expressions became more varied. Generally speaking, the women started radiating passion and love while the men looked away and some even started mumbling to themselves.

Although the reactions were divided between the two camps, it was just a momentary diversion. Most people still looked unsettled, shutting out me and everyone else around them. They simply huddled in their seats, filled with fear and despair.

This behavior was all too familiar, reminding me of the days of bitter despair in my past life. I had no intention of interacting with anyone myself. Only the front half of the bus had occupants and the back half was empty, so I sat myself at the very last row. Then, I looked down at Jiang Xiaotian.

"Dàgē. Luo'an City's not far away. Traveling with this group might slow us a little, but it'll be easier to avoid notice when traveling with a

group if we run into any checkpoints. Is this okay?"

I had no chance to ask Jiang Xiaotian about this until now, but at the same time, he hadn't given me any hints or signs either, so I had treated it as his agreement to travel with the group.

"Decide for yourself." Jiang Xiaotian gazed at me and said with mixed feelings, "Shuyu, you have a steadier head on your shoulders than I remember. I thought that after the apocalypse, my other self would protect you and Shujun, but actually, that's not the case, is it?"

I was silent for a moment before responding, "Dàgē, I dreamed a dream that was ten years long, and I even lost my memories. I don't remember what happened in the past. When I first woke up, I didn't even know who I was."

When he heard about my amnesia, Jiang Xiaotian's eyes widened slightly and he stared at me. But even if he stared at me this way, I would never say I wasn't Jiang Shuyu anymore, because I *was* Jiang Shuyu!

"You lost your memories?" Jiang Xiaotian asked softly, "You don't remember anything?"

"I'll remember bits and pieces every once in a while."

"No wonder you don't know who you are." Jiang Xiaotian frowned and asked, "Do you still wonder about it?"

"No." I gave a small smile. "Now, I only want to find everyone in the

Jiang family and live on in this apocalyptic world together.”

Jiang Xiaotian patted my shoulder in silent acknowledgement. Then, he looked down and pondered for a while, before asking, “In that ten year dream of yours, did you ever see me? Some of the ways you fight seem very familiar.”

“Yes, once. I saw you fighting with an aberrant.”

Jiang Xiaotian asked with a hint of curiosity, “What kind of aberrant?” I described everything I had seen, how he had glided on ice knives, and the snow paths that filled the skies, without disguising how much I worshipped the Ice Emperor.

Jiang Xiaotian nodded, remarking, “You can pull off those combat skills once you hit tier four. They’re not that hard. But it will eat up a lot of your energy, so it’s not very practical. You can only completely disregard the energy expenditure in creating those snow paths once you reach tier five or higher.”

Tier five. That’s a hard, distant goal.

I suddenly remembered something else. “Oh yeah, even though I didn’t realize that the Ice Emperor was you, Dàgē, the aberrant you were fighting was quite big, so I could see him quite well. He looked very unique. He was covered in blood-red lines. The two blood lines running straight down from his eyes were especially remarkable, like tears of blood were streaming down his face.”

Now that I thought about it, they resembled the blood tears that Dàgē

had shed when he was being entranced by the brainwight.

Jiang Xiaotian's expression immediately crumbled.

Shocked, I called out, "Dàgē?!"

Hearing me call him, he looked over at me, his eyes filled with terror. The sight stunned me for a moment, and I couldn't help but ask him again, "Dàgē, what's wrong?"

But Jiang Xiaotian had recovered his composure and replied calmly, "He was indeed very strong, and he had a very unique power. At the time, he was already the ruler in the area. If not for me, he probably would've grown much more powerful. Shuyu, you must never lose to him!"

The last sentence that came out of the blue placed an immense pressure on me.

I gave Jiang Xiaotian a once over. Somehow, this Dàgē didn't seem too right today, so I couldn't help but say, "Dàgē, I've told you everything. So if you have something on your mind, don't hide it from me either, okay?"

Jiang Xiaotian gazed at me solemnly, replying, "As long as you and Shujun are fine, what does Dàgē have to worry about?"

For some reason, I couldn't relax the slightest after hearing him say that. If he had brought up his suspicions or theories about parallel worlds, I might've felt a little better, but he didn't ask anything at all.

So he doesn't really care about it? Or is it weighing on his mind too much?

Jiang Xiaotian patted me and said, "Shuyu, rest well. Recover some of your energy so we're prepared for any situation. I'll keep watch while you're sleeping."

Once he said that, there was nothing to do but obediently go to sleep. If all went well, we should be able to reach Luo'an City by evening.

No matter what the crisis, nothing was as important as finding Dàgē and the others.

Knowing that Jiang Xiaotian would be guarding me, I slept extremely well. I was vaguely aware of the sensation of some clothing being placed over me, then Jiang Xiaotian slipping in under the clothes and sprawling on my chest. My arms naturally wrapped around him in a hug, and I rested my chin on the child's head, sleeping more comfortably.

I slept soundly for some time, and by the time I woke up, the sky was awash with the reds of the setting sun. It was already evening. I'd literally slept from morning to evening. But after catching up on my sleep, I felt fully recharged. Not only had I restored the flagging energy levels in my body, I even felt like I'd grown stronger.

Wait, this feels a bit too good to be true. Whoa, don't tell me I've risen to tier two?

I'd heard of tiering up in the middle of a fight, but I'd never heard of

tiering up in the middle of slumber!

I looked down at Jiang Xiaotian. He was munching on a cookie, looking quite normal... *my ass! His face is white as a sheet! Who does he think he's tricking?*

"Dàgē, what did you do?" I grated. *Your energy levels are so low that you've shrunk into a three year-old kid, and you still dare to mess around?*

Jiang Xiaotian dodged the subject. "We can see Luo'an City already. The people up front were just saying that we should be there in about ten minutes' time, so now we've probably only got five minutes to go. Pack up your stuff quickly and prepare to get off."

Pack what stuff? The two backpacks are already sitting there, and I didn't even open them. All we need to do is pick them up and go. I glared hard at him. *Don't think you can get away so easily!*

"What's done is done. I can't turn back time, so there's no use looking at me."

True. I took in a deep breath and said in a steely tone of voice, "Promise that you'll never do anything like this, ever again!"

Jiang Xiaotian nodded. "There's not much I can help with now. I was able to give you a little push because you weren't far away from breaking through before."

Is he telling the truth? It was hard to tell. *I've never heard of anyone*

helping others to break through before, so it's probably pretty difficult to do so? But then again, Dàgē is the Ice Emperor. I've never reached his heights, so who knows whether there's some secret technique?

The only thing I could do was plead with him, "Dàgē, whether or not you can turn back to normal, what's important is that we can be together as a family, right?"

Jiang Xiaotian smiled, replying, "Of course."

He stood on my thighs to be tall enough to be able to ruffle my hair.

No matter what happens to Dàgē, he'll always ruffle my hair! I chuckled and mussed up his hair even more, and I didn't stop until his hair was all poofed up. *Hehe, serves you right for always ruffling my hair!*

When I saw Jiang Xiaotian's messy, nest-like hair and his extremely resigned expression, I sniggered like some kind of weird uncle for a good while.

Then, when I next looked up, I saw a young girl standing in front of me. Seeing her wide eyes, I started breaking out in cold sweat. *I'm not a weird uncle, don't misunderstand!*

"Gēge, Mommy said to give this to you."

I blinked. The girl had already stretched her hands up at me, and in her hands were a pair of flip flops with a pink Hello Kitty design.

I was currently barefooted, but it wasn't because I had lost my shoes. Well, technically speaking, my shoes had been thrown away by Dàgē, but it was mostly to train my special abilities rather than a lack of footwear.

I accepted the flip flops; they really were quite handy. It would be too eye-catching if I wandered around the city with bare feet, so having these flip flops was much better. If I really needed to fight, I could kick off the flip flops without any hassle. *Little girl, you've opened my eyes to the wonders of the super useful flip flops!*

I took out a few pieces of chocolate and a can of mixed rice porridge from my backpack and passed it to the little girl. When I next looked up, I saw a woman staring my way anxiously. I smiled at her, and she relaxed and nodded in return. There was a man sitting next to her as well. Originally, he hadn't looked at all happy, but when he saw the chocolate and mixed rice porridge, a hint of delight flashed across his face. Obviously, he felt like he'd gotten the better deal out of this.

I rubbed the little girl's head. She was holding onto her chocolates, looking very happy, but she didn't eat them immediately. Instead, she insisted, "Gege, wear the sandals!"

I smiled as I put on the flip flops. The size was about right, slightly on the small side. I couldn't tell if the flip flops were especially large or if Jiang Shuyu had small feet.

Pink Hello Kitty flip flops are for girls, right? There's even a crystal ribbon on it! I suddenly felt like I wasn't much better off wearing the sandals compared to being bare footed.

The little girl smiled and waved her hand as she said, "Bye, gēge. Bye, dìdi."

I smiled as I waved goodbye too, my mood suddenly lightening. Then, the vehicle came to an abrupt stop. I craned my head to look outside. There weren't any skyscrapers to be seen, and it looked like we were in a rural area. A little distance away, there were walls and barbed wire. *This is... a military zone?*

"We're here!" The bus bustled with activity as everyone stood up and stuck their heads out of the windows.

I frowned. "This doesn't look like the city." *Was I tricked?* But there were all kinds of survivors here, and they didn't seem like they were part of the same gang. If this place really wasn't Luo'an City, they wouldn't react this way. Surely not *everyone* came from another world like me and didn't recognize the cities in this world?

"The shelter won't be in the city. They were probably referring to the suburbs when they said Luo'an City." Jiang Xiaotian patted me. "Look over there."

At his prompting, I immediately turned over to look, and saw the skyscrapers some distance away on the other side.

Jiang Xiaotian said, "You don't have to rush to get into the city. The me in this world won't ask you to go into the city to look for clues. That would be too dangerous. The tower he mentioned is probably on the outskirts of the city and will definitely be a big landmark, so you can find it easily. Let's follow the others first, then decide what to do

once we know more.”

I nodded. Although they were Dàgēs from two different worlds, Dàgē was still Dàgē, and his judgment was probably correct.

Except, they were two people from two different worlds, but at the same time, they were the same person. *If I meet the Guan Weijun of this world, will she still be me?*

“There were quite a few examples of military zones that were converted into shelters. Things were chaotic after the black fog, but once things settled down a little, government organizations finally started operating again. As it turned out, places with stationed troops were the best places to build shelters.”

Jiang Xiaotian gazed at the barb wire wall, a three year-old with a troubled expression. Just looking at him troubled me greatly as well.

“But these shelters only existed at the beginning stages of the apocalypse. As food became scarcer, governments collapsed, and the military turned into warlords and started carving out their own territories. All of them are like cancer!” He turned to look at me. “Shuyu, if you are to search for clues in there, you need to be careful. Don’t reveal your actual capabilities without good reason.”

I picked up the backpacks, the child, and the potted plant, and joined at the end of the queue of people waiting to get off the bus. Then, I replied, “Don’t worry, Dàgē. Your dìdi looks like a delicate and weak pretty boy, an easy target for bullying.”

Jiang Xiaotian gave me a hard look, then sighed, "You really do look even better than you did in my memories. Shuyu, you need to be strong."

I nodded gravely. In fact, when I got back, I had to train Shujun properly. She was a *real* pretty girl and was in far more danger than I was!

Once we got off the car, I lifted my head to look at the military zone, and I balked.

As expected of signs left by Dàgē, they were really easy to spot. As long as I traveled in this direction from our house, there was no way I could miss this big, black tower that was looming over me. It sat in the military zone and was extremely eye-catching, as there was not a single tall building around it.

"You like the watch tower?"

I turned to see Unruly-looking Guy, who had wandered over without me noticing, his face full of smiles.

"There's a story behind this tower, you—"

I cut in with a question, "Can we go in there?"

There were a fair number of tents and lots of people outside the military zone. I didn't know why they hadn't gone inside. *Are there some rules governing who can enter?*

"There are too many people." Unruly-looking Guy explained, "All newcomers need to register and wait for three days outside before they are let in. It's a preventative measure against people hiding infected wounds."

I nodded to indicate my understanding. At this stage, people still weren't hardy enough and they'd die very quickly if their wounds got infected. And problems kicked in once they died.

"You've got to stay outside for three days as well. But don't be scared, I'll come check on you."

Jiang Xiaotian gripped my hand, evidently disliking this guy.

"Oh yeah, I'm called Chen Yanqing. How about you?"

Before I could reply, Crew-cut Soldier rushed over in a hurry, yelling, "Qing, quit troubling the kid."

Chen Yanqing immediately looked back at him and hollered furiously, "Guo Hong! Just tell me *how* am I troubling him?"

Guo Hong stopped, looking a little surprised. He looked at Chen Yanqing, then at what he was holding, then at me hesitantly.

"He's just helping me hold stuff," I replied truthfully.

It was obvious that this guy was very interested in me, but he didn't do anything, so he was someone I could befriend first. We were in a military zone and these two were soldiers, so a rapport with them

would come in handy, whether it was to ward off any trouble or even to help locate Dàgē and the others.

Guo Hong frowned, saying, "We're supposed to round up the civilians and take them to the gathering point. Everyone's busy so you have no excuse not helping out some of the civilians as well."

"So he doesn't count as a civilian?" Chen Yanqing said smugly, "Besides, look at his face. If we don't keep an eye on him, I guarantee that something bad's gonna happen to him immediately. You haven't forgotten about those mercs who came by recently, right?"

Mercenaries?

I became extremely agitatedly and demanded, "Where? *Where* are the mercenaries?"

The two looked at me in surprise.

"Right there." Chen Yanqing pointed at the military zone, and I became so excited that I started trembling unconsciously.

Dàgē, Shujun, Uncle, Auntie, the JDT mercenaries...

They're right there!

Extra Chapter: The Journey Home, Part Two

Jiang Shutian was the first to wake up.

Reflexively, he touched his chest and confirmed that he was still alive. Then, feeling silly about such an action, he lowered his hand with a bitter smile. That wave of pain had been so terrifying that he thought he was going to die.

He turned around, looking at the others, and saw that red-haired Jenny was moving. She was lifting her head up.

"Up already? Wake up the others. We need to hurry and hit the road ..."

Jiang Shutian's sentence trailed off. She raised her head and looked straight at him, her face covered with translucent fish scales. Her mouth ripped open, revealing a mouth filled with sharp teeth. Her throat even had lines of openings that fluttered non-stop. They were fish gills!

But he could still tell from that face that it was Jenny. Jiang Shutian didn't know how to react. He even began to worry about what he currently looked like. *Could it be...*

Jiang Shutian abruptly pulled his gun out and aimed at the half-monster, half-human Jenny—she was pouncing at him. He hesitated for a second but in the end, he could not bring himself to shoot, choosing to duck aside instead. However, something swept at his legs, almost tripping him. He looked down to discover that Jenny's legs had morphed into a large fish tail.

With the body of a human and the tail of a fish, she was practically a mermaid. But the mermaid in front of him was absolutely nothing like the beautiful ones from fairytales. The fish tail was a wretched shade of green, as if mold were growing on it, and spikes jutted out of it. Jiang Shutian aimed at the fish tail and fired a few shots. She was in so much pain that she leapt non-stop, shrieking like a strangled chicken. By now, the muzzle had already moved to point between Jenny's eyes. Jiang Shutian gazed at that face that was both familiar yet foreign, struggling to shoot. Before he could open fire, a throwing knife had stabbed into her head, and she slowly sagged to the floor. "Boss!"

Jiang Shutian turned his head. Xiao Sha was looking at Jenny in alarm.

Xiao Sha still retained the appearance of a human. Judging from the way he was looking at himself, Jiang Shutian could conclude that he also appeared human.

"What *is* that thing?" Xiao Sha asked in disbelief.

Jiang Shutian opened his mouth and only then realized that from Xiao Sha's angle, the large fish tail had blocked more than half of his view. He had probably not realized that this was Jenny and had only seen a monster attacking his boss, thus he was able to act so decisively.

He hesitated over what to say. But the next moment, someone grabbed his ankle. Jiang Shutian looked down and saw Jenny yawning her mouth wide open, about to take a bite of his leg.

Bang, bang, bang!

Jiang Shutian fired three consecutive shots and blasted away most of her head.

In that moment, he completely understood what kind of apocalypse this was: it was terrifying beyond expectation.

With such a great commotion, some of the others woke up in a daze. Jiang Shutian surveyed the inside of the car and then pressed the muzzle of his gun to the head of furry monster with a snout.

It was Wu Zaiyu, the rookie mercenary, Wu the Ewe. He had always said that once he married a girl, he would then be able to raise a dog with her at home. Cain had always teased him that he was marrying just to get a dog. But before the rookie could realize that future, he had turned into a dog himself.

After Jiang Shutian pulled the trigger and lowered the gun, he realized that his steady right hand that had never missed a mark was shaking.

"Boss, t-they're..." Xiao Shao made out the fish's face and realized that the monster he had attacked had actually been his comrade.

"Dead." Jiang Shutian coldly said, "Jenny would never attack me. That thing isn't her."

Xiao Sha nodded, silent. He hesitated for a bit but still asked, "Will we become like that too?"

Jiang Shutian firmly answered, "No."

If everyone would turn into monsters, Shuyu would not have asked him to prepare supplies, so not everyone would turn. He just didn't know what the trigger was. Jenny and Wu Zaiyu did not have anything in common.

How many will turn into monsters at home?

Can Shuyu really handle it?

The more Jiang Shutian thought about it, the more his heart sank. He also completely failed to realize that his siblings could become monsters.

"Xiao Sha, wake up the others. We're returning immediately!"

However, this "immediately" took several days. Jiang Shutian had never thought that there would be so many monsters, or that they would all be different types with completely different abilities so that there was simply no way of predicting what they could do. Many of them were much tougher to deal with than Jenny, who had been a fish out of water.

Although guns were still useful, the moment a shot was fired, it would attract hundreds and thousands of monsters. They had to sneak along the entire way and were forced to only use daggers to fight with those monsters.

It only took a momentary lapse of concentration for Zheng Xing to get bitten.

Everyone had grim looks on their faces. At the start of the apocalypse when they hadn't figured out anything, they had already lost Jenny and Wu Zaiyu. Now, they would even have to lose Zheng Xing too?

"Kill me." Zheng Xing took a deep breath. "Let me die as a human."

The group's eyes reddened. Cain lifted his gun, intending to send off his comrade, only to be ordered "Stop!" by their boss.

"Give him a shot of antibiotics." Jiang Shutian calmly said, "If we die from a single bite, then Shuyu wouldn't have asked me to get hold of so many antibiotics."

Hearing that, the mercenaries, who had survived through countless battles, almost cried with relief. The next day, after seeing that Zheng Xing was still human and able to eat, talk, and not bite people, they really did burst into tears.



"Boss?"

After many days of risking life and limb to escape, he had finally arrived home. Yet, Jiang Shutian did not dare to get out of the car. Yes, the man who had entered the mercenary world before even turning twenty was, at this very moment, afraid to get out of the car.

But his family was waiting for his rescue, and a second could spell the difference between life and death. Jiang Shutian could not permit himself to be weak here. He pulled the door open and was out of the car the next moment, leading the charge into his house.

The moment Jiang Shutian opened the front door, he felt all the blood in his body freeze.

It was absolute chaos inside—the living room furniture was overturned and many places had been stained dark red. It was dried blood. He was going crazy.

“Shuyu!” He rushed into the living room and passed through the kitchen. The entrance was blocked off by stacks of stuff, but he did not see anyone.

“Shujun!” The hallway was dyed with blood. *Whose blood am I stepping on?*

“Where are you? Answer me!”

“Boss, there’s...” Ceng Yunqian stuck her head out from the second floor. However, after shouting “there’s,” she did not know how to finish that sentence and was at a loss of what to do.

Jiang Shutian rushed directly to the second floor. He blankly stood rooted to the spot. The floor in front of Shuyu’s door was completely stained a dark red, dotted with specks of yellow-white. An unbearable, rotting stench emanated from it.

He was too frightened to take another step, too scared of going into Shuyu's room, too afraid to even think...

The mercenaries stood behind him, not daring to make a sound.

Dàgē—

The group all started. Although the voice hadn't been loud, they had definitely heard it.

Jiang Shutian growled, shoving the suffocating worry out of his mind, and jumped straight from the second floor to the first. He glanced into Shujun's room but found no one there. He turned around and saw that Lin-bó's door was closed. Jiang Shutian couldn't stand the torture anymore and forcefully kicked the door open. There, he saw a figure lying on the bed.

He rushed over with long strides and lowered his head to look. He nearly broke down there and then. That face was no longer a human's. But his gaze was.

Jiang Shutian took another look. This was his younger brother. It was just that he was skinny to the point that he didn't look human. He stretched his hand out to touch the face of that person lying on the bed, his touch feather-light for fear of breaking him. He couldn't feel any flesh, only skin and bones. *Is this really my dīdi who has been handsome beyond words since childhood?*

"Shuyu..."

Jiang Shutian was speechless when he saw his brother open his mouth to say something, but he couldn't hear anything. He quickly lowered his head to listen closely.

"What?"

"Basement. Junjun."

Jiang Shutian didn't know how he had responded. His heart both ached and was bursting with pride. Shuyu had really protected the family. He had been the one protecting the family all along. As for him, the elder brother, what had he done? What was he doing?!

The person lying in bed heaved sigh of relief, and his eyes slowly closed.

"Shuyu!" Jiang Shutian frantically yelled.

Both eyes opened a little, as if shocked open, but his gaze wasn't focusing at all.

"Bring over the antibiotics! Now! Shuyu, wake up, you've got to stay awake, Shuyu—"

Zheng Xing rushed in and pushed his boss away. Seeing Shuyu's condition shocked him too, but he immediately took over the emergency rescue effort.

Jiang Shutian could only stand there senselessly. He knew that his sister was in the basement, and that her situation was unknown, but

he also knew that as long as Shuyu was breathing, Shujun would be all right.

Just as expected, before long, Shujun rushed in. It was only then that Jiang Shutian snapped out of his daze and quickly wrapped his arms around his sister and forcibly took her out of the room. On the way out, he also locked the door to prevent her from getting in again.

Jiang Shujun yelled hysterically, "What are you doing, Dàgē? I want to see Èrgē! Èrgē!"

Nevertheless, Jiang Shutian refused to let her go in. If Shujun were to see Shuyu's condition, and how he was currently being resuscitated, she would likely fall apart on the spot.

Unable to break free, Jiang Shujun sobbed, turning to pound her fists against Jiang Shutian's chest over and over again.

"Dàgē, where did you go? Why are you only home now? You don't know how much Èrgē pushed himself. He couldn't even stand up steadily, but he still used a baseball bat to save us, and he even went to check the basement. Lin-bó grabbed him and..."

Jiang Shutian hugged his sister and listened to the several days of events his brother had experienced, suddenly feeling like trash. He had plenty of firepower but he had still taken such a long time to return home. Conversely, his dìdi, with a dilapidated body and a single baseball bat, had saved the entire family!

"Dàgē, I..." Jiang Shujun was filled with dread, and the pace of her breathing quickened. She babbled, "I locked Èrgē outside. He told me not to open the door. U-Uncle and Auntie were behind me, so I didn't dare open the door. But... Èrgē's dead because of this, right? I killed Èrgē!"

Jiang Shutian's heart ached. Shujun was panicking to the point that she was incoherent. He didn't fully understand the situation, but he did know how heavily Shujun relied on Shuyu. If what she said was true, she had locked Shuyu outside the door. For these past few days, just how much pressure had Shujun had to bear? Now, all that stress was let out in one explosive burst and she was completely hysterical.

He squashed down his guilt and slapped his sister.

"Nonsense. Your Èrgē is doing well. Who do you think you've killed?"

Shujun stopped and caressed her face without feeling the pain. She could only stare at Dàgē and asked in a daze, "Èrgē is fine?"

"Of course he's fine. Have you forgotten his reputation of being the healthy boy who never gets sick?" Shuyu's skinny and rugged body kept flashing through Jiang Shutian's mind. Not only was he trying to persuade his sister, he was also trying to persuade himself.

"Yeah!" Jiang Shujun brushed her tears away and smiled. "I'm glad that Èrgē is fine. I'm glad that Dàgē has returned. With both of you here, our family will definitely be all right."

Jiang Shutian hugged his sister. He hoped it would be so, begged that it would be so.

Shuyu, I've come home. You also need to come back quickly.

Epilogue: Afterword

I didn't progress as far into the plot as I had expected when writing the second volume. Then again, it's to be expected. Looking back at my upcoming plans, it's fairly obvious that there was no way I could have finished all that in this volume!

I really wonder if my brain was eaten by an aberrant for me to ever dream that this storyline could have been packed within one volume. I ended up discovering that I had only written about half of the storyline in this volume, and I need a whole other volume to finish off the other half. This is also why I couldn't use the original stopping point I'd come up with, and even had to exceed my word count a little in order to cut this volume off at a more reasonable cliffhanger.

This volume finishes the second half of the extra, "The Journey Home." The next extra is "Ice-bound Splendor and Majesty," and from the name you can tell it's an extra about the Ice Emperor. This is an extra that I really, really wanted to write. Actually, I've already written quite a few paragraphs secretly. I look forward to seeing everyone's reactions to the miracle of the Ice Emperor!

I really want to talk about the Ice Emperor here, but I'm told that there are readers who read the afterword first before reading the content, and that adding all kinds of warnings are useless. I don't dare to say too much and risk spoiling anything; otherwise, there won't be any more surprises when you read.

But I still want to ask: did anyone guess who the Ice Emperor is?

Previously, when I was posting online, I saw everyone's comments seeming to point at a certain person being the Ice Emperor. At the time, I really wanted to just shout out the right answer, and I had to struggle not to give any hints to everyone. I wonder if this ending was outside of everyone's expectations?

"Ice-Bound Splendor and Majesty" will explain what had happened to the Jiang family in the previous life, but there are already plenty of hints in this volume, and people should be able to piece together the general picture—it's just the details that are missing.

Let me think if I've missed anything. Ah, yes. This volume doesn't have "One Day in the Apocalypse," because I only have two snippets, and one snippet involves a certain Jin Zhan who has only been mentioned but not seen in a certain volume. After some thought, I decided to accumulate more of these before including them in an extra; otherwise, having only two short snippets is pretty OTL-worthy.

I really can't wait for the next volume to come out, because there'll a certain plot point that I super want to write! Not the extra—although I also really want to write the extra—but the main story!

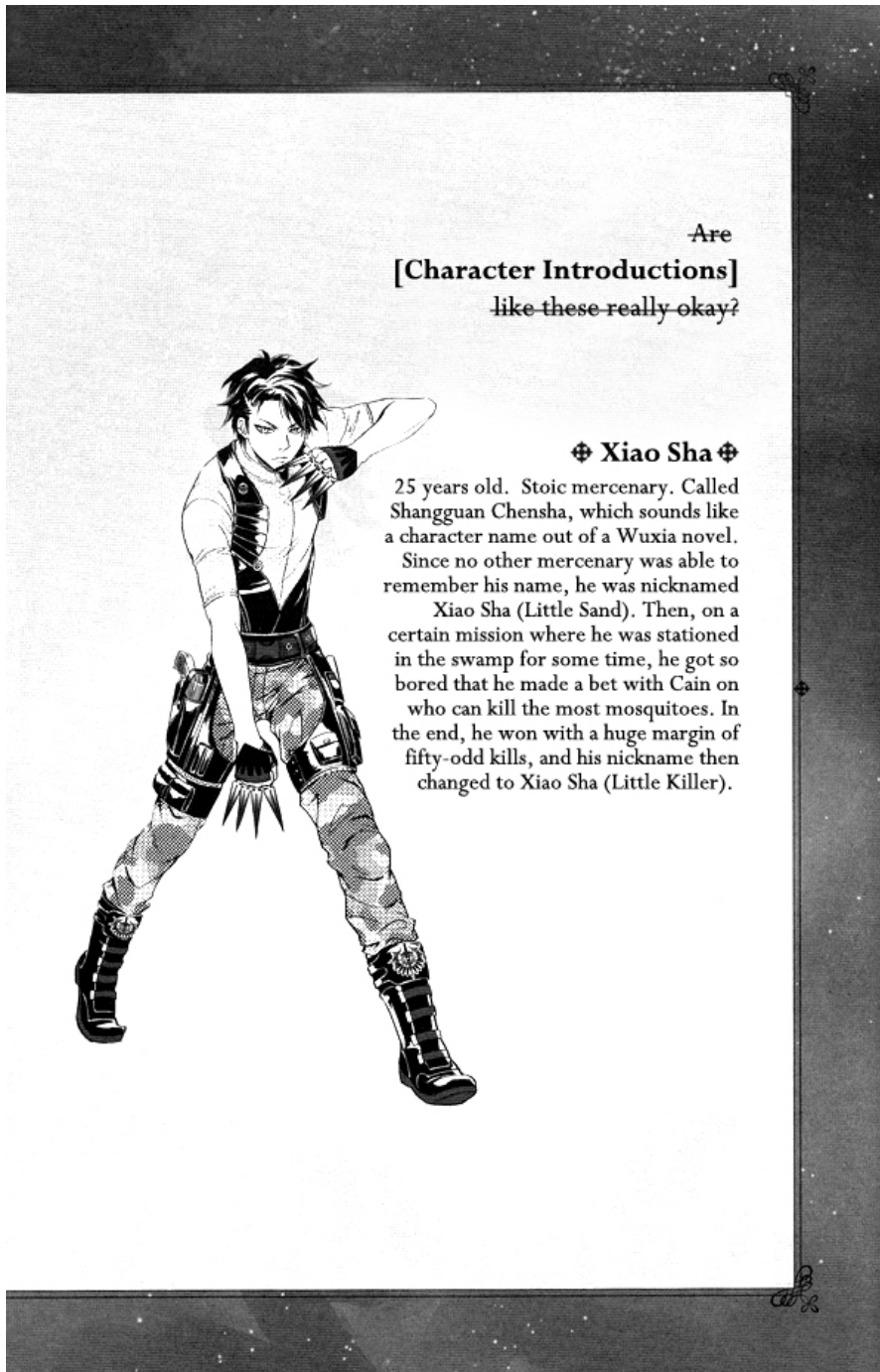
By the way, the scene I really wanted to write in this volume was the moment the Ice Emperor made his appearance. I had written it early on and had been waiting for the plot to develop to this point to weave it in. As for the next "plot point I want to write the most," hehe, wait and see in the next volume.

To all the readers in all the various parallel worlds, let's see each other in the next volume~

By Yu Wo



Are **[Character Introductions]** ~~like these really okay?~~—**translated by purplezero**
(proofread by EvlNabiki & Elkin; C/E edited by lucathia)



Xiao Sha

25 years old.

Stoic

mercenary.

Called

Shangguan

Chensha,

which sounds

like a

character

name out of a

Wuxia novel.

Since no other

mercenary

was able to

remember his

name, he was

nicknamed

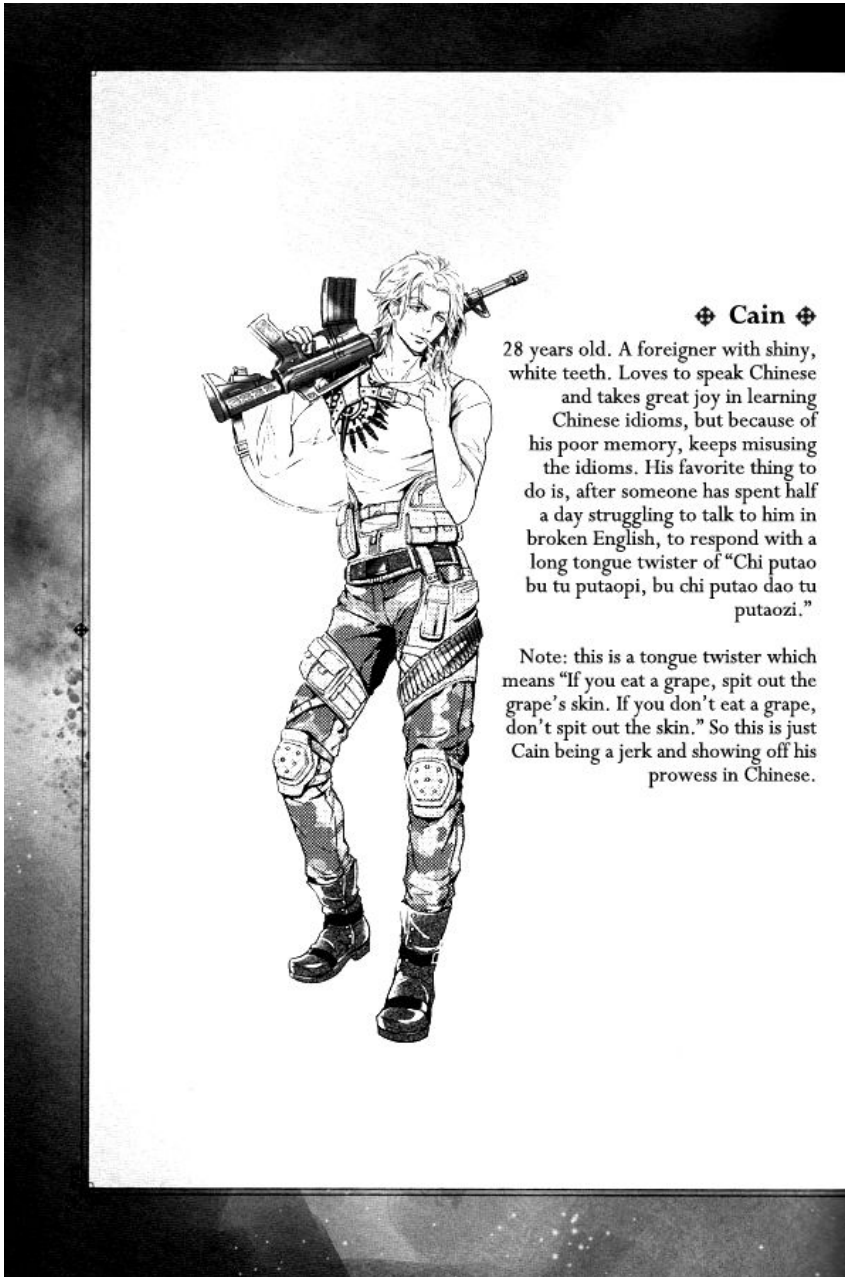
Xiao Sha

(Little Sand).

Then, on a

certain

mission where he was stationed in the swamp for some time, he got so bored that he made a bet with Cain on who can kill the most mosquitoes. In the end, he won with a huge margin of fifty-odd kills, and his nickname then changed to Xiao Sha (Little Killer).



◆ Cain ◆

28 years old. A foreigner with shiny, white teeth. Loves to speak Chinese and takes great joy in learning Chinese idioms, but because of his poor memory, keeps misusing the idioms. His favorite thing to do is, after someone has spent half a day struggling to talk to him in broken English, to respond with a long tongue twister of "Chi putao bu tu putaopi, bu chi putao dao tu putaozi."

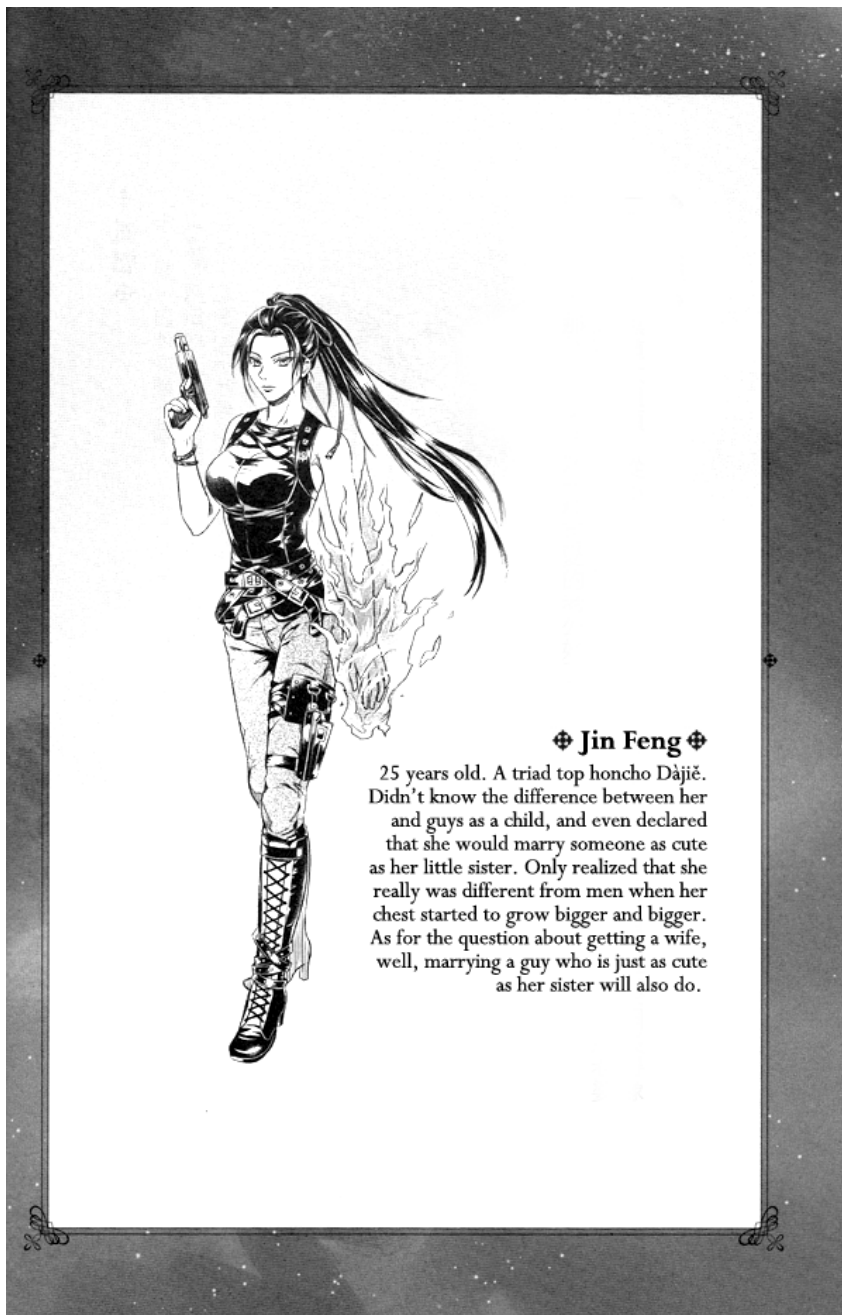
Note: this is a tongue twister which means "If you eat a grape, spit out the grape's skin. If you don't eat a grape, don't spit out the skin." So this is just Cain being a jerk and showing off his prowess in Chinese.

Cain

28 years old. A foreigner with shiny, white teeth. Loves to speak Chinese and takes great joy in learning Chinese idioms, but because of his poor memory, keeps misusing the idioms. His favorite thing to do is, after someone has spent half a day struggling to talk to him in broken English, to respond with a long tongue

twister of "Chī pútáo bù tǔ pútáopí, bù chī pútáo dào tǔ pútáozi."

Note: this is a tongue twister which means "If you eat a grape, spit out the grape's skin. If you don't eat a grape, don't spit out the skin" (吃葡萄不吐葡萄皮不吃葡萄倒吐葡萄籽). So this is just Cain being a jerk and showing off his prowess in Chinese.



✦ Jin Feng ✦

25 years old. A triad top honcho Dàjiě. Didn't know the difference between her and guys as a child, and even declared that she would marry someone as cute as her little sister. Only realized that she really was different from men when her chest started to grow bigger and bigger. As for the question about getting a wife, well, marrying a guy who is just as cute as her sister will also do.

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